

Comrade Max Nordau

Selected socialist writings

Translated by
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Abstract:

This is a translation of a selection of Max Nordau's writings that allows the reader to evaluate whether this author was a socialist. Nordau's founding of Zionism, and his over-all intellectual work, – 'that jackass Nordau' (1881 letter of Marx to Engels); 'a man more grandiloquent than profound' (Trotsky 1900), – are purported misgivings against branding Nordau a 'comrade' (which is the form of address among socialists). Against these and other more visceral objections, the present translation outlines the socialist standpoint of this paradigmatic Zionist. The reader might consider broader implications.

Keywords: Max Nordau; Zionism; socialism; class struggle; anti-Semitism

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Comrade Max Nordau

[Nordau] was throughout his life a mentor of all our leaders. That his advice was not always followed was not his fault. His subordination under the leadership of Herzl was a testimony to his great modesty. In political experience and farsightedness, and especially in his knowledge of Judaism, he was superior to Herzl.¹

A preamble, for momentarily easing liberal anxieties; Nordau did not advocate eugenics, he opposed racism, in particular anti-black prejudice (naming it 'anti-Hamitism'), misogyny, and the persecution of homosexuality.²

The reason Max Nordau (1849–1923) did not promote himself as a socialist is perhaps a wish of retaining the audience's interest for his ideas on their own account. Ben-Horin, in an appreciative study of Nordau's thought, ventures

¹Bodenheimer 1963 [1940], pp. 195–6. Nordau is alleged to be one 'of the principal architects of today's Israel' (Löb 1998, p. 25). This is not a complimentary assertion by Löb, whose text joins a fairly standard Nordau-interpretation.

²'Redeem the millions of their harrowing care, give them plenty of food and rational hygienics, and allow their natural sympathies to work out their matrimonial choice [...] Eugenics, to be largely efficient, must be considered, not as a biological, but as an economical question' (Nordau 1906, p. 33). Also, he opposed the death penalty (see Nordau 1911a). Nordau rejected race science in his welcoming review of Jean Finot's *Race Prejudice*: 'Humanity arose from a single tribe and trends toward unity in civilisation and knowledge. All experience justifies the feelings of community and equality, not that of inequality and mutual hatred' (Nordau 1905a, p. 3, my translation). Gobineau's race theory merely gave an educated veneer of legitimation, but was not the actual cause of anti-Semitism, lynching of blacks, or anti-yellow sentiment (expressed against Japan in 1904). Apropos Thomas Dixon's white supremacist novel (*The Leopard's Spots*) Nordau retorts: 'There is undeniably a Negro question in the United States, and it is certainly very serious and difficult. But whose fault is this? The Negroes did not come to America by their own spur, they did not desire the honour of becoming a citizen of the United States. They were dragged away by people-hunters with violence from Africa. The sons of the slave-traders cannot refuse the responsibility for the sins of the fathers. The descendants are inheritors of the forebears, for the honour as well as for the shame. ... The earlier slave-holders are today anti-Hamites (Nordau 1903a, p. 7, my translation). An indication of Nordau's liberal-minded stance on the woman question is his rebuttal to the male students in Germany who opposed women's entry in the study of medicine (Nordau 1899a). In an appreciative review of Finot's *Problems of the Sexes* Nordau mentions how its author rebuffs the evil alleged about women 'with pseudo-scientific seriousness and buffoon malice', in particular by 'the mad driveller [Otto] Weininger, whose idiotic outpourings are lauded as a manifestation of genius by certain imbeciles' (Nordau 1913c, p. 218). In France Nordau was among the few writers in 1895 willing to sign a petition against Oscar Wilde's prosecution (see Nordau 1928, p. 146, also mentioned in *La Revue* 1915, volume 113, p. 490), and he signed the petition of Magnus Hirschfeld's Scientific-Humanitarian Committee against Germany's paragraph 175 (see *Jahrbuch für Sexuelle Zwischenstufen*, 1899, p. 258).

little further than the innocuous characterisation of it as 'solidaritarianism'.³ The criteria by which a figure qualifies as a socialist may be decided upon with whatever degree of rigour, and I try to cover a comprehensive range of indicative subjects (Nordau's stance on imperialism, war, class struggle, and so on), but I do not arbitrarily impose some ranking on them (or pick one as decisive for labelling someone a socialist or not).⁴

1. Nordau and his key role in Zionism

In the case of defining a Zionist, Nordau opted for the highest rigour. While Nordau strictly evaluated Herzl's diplomatic efforts as failures,⁵ in his view the so-called 'practical' current, which reasserted itself from within and took over the Zionist Organisation (ZO) after Herzl's death under Wolffsohn, – and espoused by a clique of unelected social climbers, yes-men on the payroll of Weizmann, staffing the Actions Committee, – barely qualified as Zionist, as

³Ben-Horin concedes Nordau's 'solidaritarian socialism', but circumscribes it as being 'largely confined to the realm of generalities' and 'a social experimentalism', with one of Nordau's assessments of the figure of Jean Jaurès said to contain 'a good deal of self-revelation' (see Ben-Horin 1956, pp. 157, 232). Prior to Ben-Horin's study there was also a 1939 Hungarian biography by Béla Révész (1876–1944), incidentally a socialist.

⁴Nordau's activities or socialist reception of his writings is touched briefly here (as I consider them at best only indirect evidence). Living in Paris (after 1880) Nordau gave evening lectures about social issues in the German Social Democratic Reading Club (see Wininger 1936, p. 540). This club, founded in 1877, proved useful after the German anti-socialist law in 1878, and was visited by Bernstein, Liebknecht and Zetkin, though no data survives on its early existence (see König 2007, pp. 37–8). At the leftwing-dissident Institut des Hautes Etudes (de Belgique) Nordau gave a course on art (see Jules Destrée's 'Préoccupations ... du Parti socialiste Belge', *La Revue socialiste*, 1897, p. 322). His lecture (on Spain) in Núñez de Arenas' socialist Escuela Nueva was published in *El Socialista* (see Nordau 1915a).

Nordau's *Conventional Lies of Our Civilisation* was read by the Mexican anarchist Flores Magón and was part of the promoted literature of the Casa del Obrero Mundial. Its chapter on economy appeared separately in Russian under the title *The Lie of the Capitalist System*. The anarchist Rudolf Rocker translated it into Yiddish (London: Arbayter fraynd, 1904, and in 1901, also in London, Frayhayt published the chapters on marriage and religion – as noted by Stanislawski 2001). Yrjö Sirola translated it in 1906 and Arvi Nikolainen did the religion chapter in 1907, both with socialist publisher Vuolukka. A selection appeared in *Social-Demokraten* (reprinted in volume 1 of *Socialistiske Pjecer* 1885, pp. 109–83, Copenhagen). A Spanish translation appeared serially in 1887 in *Acracia*, an anarchist journal co-edited by Anselmo Lorenzo. Pablo Iglesias read it too. Its Spanish translator, Nicolás Salmerón y García, one of the pioneers of radical socialism in Spain, also translated Nordau's *Degeneration* (in the epilogue to the 1902 Spanish edition Nordau highlighted this book's political motive, namely the exposing of the reactionary, irrationalist obscurantism of pseudo-radical avant-guardism). In 1894 the socialist couple Henric Streitman and Rachel Vermont translated the first volume of Nordau's *Degeneration* in Romanian.

⁵See for instance Friesel 1983.

followers of the Basel program (the founding document of Zionism in 1897, drafted under Nordau's chairmanship).⁶ Exposing the 'great men' of the ZO, Nordau in the concluding piece (26 November 1920) of his 'Zionist testament'⁷ wrote, just for example:

Why must one fear the terribly menacing resistance of the Arabs? Because our brilliant politicians did not want to take serious the Arab danger, they neglected establishing an agreement with our future Muslim neighbours and compatriots before their soul was poisoned by Syrian anti-Semitic agitators, and because they treated me with supreme disdain when, verbally and in letter, I incessantly entreated them to concentrate their whole attention on the Arab question and use, for a friendly rapprochement between us and the Arabs, the services of a man, who seemed to me designed by providence itself for that delicate and vitally important task.⁸

This was apparently his last article, as Nordau's health prevented further writing, but he likely viewed the 1922 Palestine Mandate as too indefinite and a sellout by the ZO.⁹ Due to its forceful defence of Zionism, two decades later

⁶The upholding of the 'original, Herzlian core of the ideology' after the war pitted Nordau against the ZO leaders, plus (then still) Jabotinsky (see Stanislawski 2001, pp. 242–43).

⁷These ten articles are titled as such in Nordau 1928, p. 325. I use here Nordau 1928 (German translation) as it is online, but this autobiographical work exists also in Hebrew (1929, translated by Joseph Lichtenbaum), and somewhat revised in French (Paris, 1949), English (New York, 1943) and Spanish (Buenos Aires, 1943).

⁸Nordau 1920f, p. 4 (my translation). Nordau's friend Abraham Yahuda: '[On the train] I spent several hours with him [Weizmann] and sought to impress upon him the importance of the Arab question' (Yahuda 1952, p. 17). Yahuda had already tried convincing Herzl on this.

⁹Indicative is also Bodenheimer 1963, pp. 280–1. Upon Nordau's death Anatoly Lunacharsky wrote a short obituary in the Art and Culture section of *Izvestija* (10 February 1923, p. 4), but the available scan of it is unreadable.

Nordau's last book *La Esencia de la Civilización* appeared posthumously in a poor translation, that did not everywhere follow the manuscript (see Ben-Horin 1956). Ben-Horin quoted a line from it: '[I]n 1920 Max Nordau justly admonished modern man that "the contrast between the perfection offered by technology and the insufficiencies with which the great majority must yet be content, accords to our material civilization a measure of cruelty altogether alien to ancient primitivism which subjected all to the same hardship"' (Ben-Horin 1959, p. 45, citing Nordau's *Das Wesen der Gesittung* manuscript, p. 24). Nordau's daughter, in a 1926 lecture on him, alluded to it: '[I]n his last moments ... Nordau, abandoned, scorned, disappointed, still kept on fighting lie and pussilanimity. Almost on his deathbed he wrote a book passionately denouncing the lie of the Versailles "peace"'. An unknown bidder acquired the manuscript in 2016. Table of contents: I Gesittung 1-30 II Der Werdegang der Gesittung 31-66 III Die Schopfung von Werte 67-113 IV Die Ironie der Gesittung 114-154 V Organisation und Individualismus 115-212 VI Die gefährliche Klippe 213-244 VII Die Triebe der Gesittung 245-

the Revisionists issued an English translation of this article (slightly edited, together with part of the preceding article), against what they viewed as the ZO's opposition to (not even abandonment of) Zionism.¹⁰ If some find the rejection of Weizmann (Ben-Gurion and by implication their path toward the foundation of the State of Israel) as real Zionist to be absurdly restrictive, let them then consistently extend their broad tolerance in classifying also everything that vaguely sounds socialist, as real socialist. Nordau raised for example the concrete demand that the British allocate ownership of (the Sultan's) public domains, which also could be used as collateral to secure funds, to the Jews, as prospects for the plan of buying private lands seemed dim, and moreover, even were the sum payable, all the presently private land would anyway be far from sufficient (to accomodate millions of Jews).¹¹

Herewith he refrained from the justifying argument of industrial development of the country (in the form of large factories), which intrinsically was a horrible idea to him, given its 'social stratification'; and if capital and labour (in this scenario of an industrial Palestine) somehow surmounted their traditional antagonism, they would still be subject to 'all the fluctuations of supply and demand, to every periodic crisis of the world market'; even in the best case a great urban and proletarian population would suffer mental and physical health problems, and besides, remain drifting, not fixed to the land, although Palestine were internationally recognised as home for Jews.¹²

2. Imperialism (ideology), colonisation, national independence, war

With an eye on the harm done firstly to the native population, he explicitly rejected the ideological justifications for the scramble for Africa, – which he branded 'rabies africana', a mental epidemic affecting the reigning classes of Europe, – disposing each;¹³ introduction of European culture; teaching of the treadmill of labour; spread of Christianity ('We have incontestable evidence

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¹⁰See Nordau 1943 (online at nli.org.il).

¹¹For example in his 24 September 1920 'The Land Question in Palestine' (in Nordau 1936; in English in *The Sentinel*, 29 October 1920, pp. 3, 7, 8).

¹²See Nordau 1936, pp. 294-5.

¹³Nordau 1891. The article can be read at hathitrust.org.

that great negro tribes have reached a comparatively high culture, without the least European influence, ... by their own efforts only'¹⁴); lifting of African slavery ('Domestic African slavery was rarely a degradation ...'¹⁵). Lastly Nordau rejects the alleged material benefits to (the majority of) Europeans themselves; commercial profits ('To obtain them, conquest is unnecessary' and the military expenditure is a burden upon tax-payers); colonisation ('[... in tropical Africa] this is mere madness'¹⁶). Nordau also voiced criticism, in 1911, apropos the Europeans' invasion of Morocco, Tripoli and Cyrenaica, and north Persia, which was 'no longer like with all previous overseas territorial acquisitions, the subjugation of coloured - by us called inferior - races by the ostensible superior races, but the disempowerment [*Entmündigung*] of whites by whites, the destruction of independent states by overwhelming force of arms. [... Europe] justifies its acts of violence a bit with its duty of bringing culture to backward countries, and chiefly with its expansion drive, which it declares natural and legitimate'.¹⁷ In detail he exposed this agenda of a 'very small minority from the reigning classes'. 'All overseas territorial acquisitions in the last half century are political and capitalist enterprises'. He mentioned an interpellation of socialist deputy Lagrosillière, which showcased the violent expropriation of Tunisian natives, whose land-property is given to state officials or sold on the cheap; the offense at Oujda where new violation began with displacement of Moroccans from their soil-parcels in favour of French

¹⁴Nordau 1891, p. 72.

¹⁵Nordau 1891, p. 74. This reason was still given for example in the British Mandate for the Cameroons (Article 4).

¹⁶Nordau 1891, p. 75.

¹⁷Nordau 1911b, pp. 1-2 (my translation). His *Neue Freie Presse* end-of-year reviews of world politics covering 1895-1913 run up to maybe 300 pages were they compiled. Nordau predicted the conquest by European nations of Morocco, and thereafter the 'White Race' (helped by Japan) would have one place left to conquer, namely China: 'The Abyssinians, in spite of a strong mixture of Negro blood, also refuse to be regarded as a Colored Race. ... The moment has now come when the White race will measure itself with the last Colored race which has maintained itself in full independence - the Yellow Race' (Nordau 1904d, p. 277). There are racist ideas in this article, but its fundamental point is opposition against a Western imperialist attack on China: 'By what right do we look with arrogance upon the Yellow man and regard ourselves as his superior?' (p. 279). 'The economic embarrassments of the White people cannot be cured in a zoological way; that is, by crushing the Yellow Race. They demand internal efforts on the part of the White Race; a more rational organization of society, and of the methods for the production and distribution of their industrial efforts' (Nordau 1904d, p. 284). Elsewhere he went down the list of Western justifications for war against China (bringing European civilisation, spreading Christianity, freedom of trade in China, holding China to its treaty-obligations), whose 'refutation already has become trivial' (see Nordau 1901, p. 4).

land speculators; emigration of Algerian Arabs (to Ottoman provinces) because justice and prosperity under French rule was doubtful to them.¹⁸ Nordau notes on Italy: 'To reproach it for the disregard of the Ottoman sovereignty and of the international legal order, is naive and disingenuous in a time when all governments without exception practice a cynical contempt of treaties, which does not become more moral when one masks it with cant or embellishes it with dodgy juridical hair-splitting [*Tisteleien*] of a law-distorter'.¹⁹ In this context of European conquest he advised the Turkish government, for the salvation of its own Empire, that the unrest of its nationalities 'are for Turkey more portentous than the loss of Tripoli and Crete. Every effort spent on the conciliation of the Malësors, the Macedon Bulgarians and Greeks, the tribes of Yemen, the Hellenes and Armenians, is a fruitful application of energy'.²⁰ Such advice, for widest accomodation to nationalities (including Arabs), meaning 'full freedom for their intellectual and economic development', was based on Nordau's understanding that European powers could use the opportunity of internal uprisings to intervene (and perhaps, facetiously, justify it by protection of right to national self-determination). Already at the 1905 Zionist Congress he, moreover, hints, that an intervention by the great powers (to carve up the Ottoman Empire) heightens the risk of war among themselves:

A movement that has won over a large part of the Arab people can easily take a direction that will also touch Palestine. The country of our fathers would then once again, as so often in the course of history, be jolted into the centre of political world-interest. ... The European powers would arrive in the grave dilemma, which occurs each time when the existing order is threatened in a country, at whose borders their mutual jealousy

¹⁸See Nordau 1911b, p. 2.

¹⁹Nordau 1911b, p. 8. This quote captures Nordau's thought on war in general (expounded for example in Nordau 1899b). 'Is it not calumny to denounce white humanity as a horde of war-like barbarians, lightly coated with a veneer of rational civilization? I do not believe it is' (Nordau 1899b, p. 789). Herewith Nordau is not basing himself on Social Darwinism: '[A]ccording to Darwin's concept, combat may assume moral and lovable forms [...] In this way, however, the pseudo-Darwinian philosophers and politicians do not understand the "struggle for existence." They always impart to the word of Darwin the sense of the prize-fighter and the gladiator and subject the history of mankind to the law of the jungle' (Nordau 1899b, p. 794). For an appreciation of Lamarck, see Nordau 1909c.

²⁰Nordau 1911b, p. 8.

is on the lookout. ... Europe too would regard it as a rendered service to it, when the Jewish people by a peaceful, though vigorous occupancy of Palestine would prevent violent changes of the [Ottoman] sovereignty-relations there and make [European] intervention superfluous, whose dangers are all too well-known to diplomacy.²¹

Nordau did blantly support nationalism, in the full sense of separatism, for example with the 1897 Greek-Christian battle for Crete (despite its Muslim minority), and the striving for independence of Balkan peoples in general.²² A similar position, or at least regard for the importance of the national question, both Bernstein and Kautsky maintained in an extensive debate among socialists on the Cretan question.²³ Incidentally, it seems Nordau's 1886

²¹Nordau 1909d, pp. 172–3. The Turkish government should address the deep dissatisfaction of its nationalities, thereby ensuring their loyalty, for: 'The uprising of one of these peoples [Arabs, Armenians, Druze, Maronites and Kurds], worked-on by agitators and rife with conspiracies, would be the signal for intervention of foreign powers, that is, the liquidation of the Ottoman Empire' (Nordau 1914a, p. 6, my translation).

A similar interpretation can be given to his oft-cited line: 'We shall have to be the guards of the Suez Canal' (July 1920 Albert Hall address to British statesmen), as meaning loyalty to the sovereignty of Britain (over the Canal region) against the intervention of its European rivals (through their exploitation of native revolts) in case of a new world war between the great powers, or even prevention of one being triggered over this strategic region key to Britain (on a new world war, see below our translation of Nordau 1920c). Such stability was a card (of bluff – in the absence of leverage) Nordau, in full public negotiation with the British (since the ZO Actions Committee had isolated him from British diplomats, and afterwards dressed him down for this speech, see English or French edition of his autobiography, – it is not in the German), sought to present in exchange for British meaningful guarantees, without which Nordau's position was that Zionism retain its neutrality (whereas the ZO leaders already tied themselves to Britain). His willingness to ally with states, in all transparency, seems merely intrinsic to Zionism's original plank of obtaining government-guarantees. For the sake of a thorough critique of Zionism, that would be applicable also for other movements, focus seems better aimed at this reliance on legal recognition (which is the principle characteristic of Zionism, unlike its forerunners and 'practical Zionism', establishing 'facts on the ground'), and less at the coincidental presence of the Canal near Palestine (anyway, a Zionist easily can claim that Britain, for its part, used the excuse or cover of Zionism as a justifying reason for being in Palestine). An elaboration of his Albert Hall address is in Nordau 1920d (in that same journal, by the way, he wrote 'The Jewish People and the League of Nations' and 'Interconfessional Questions in Palestine'). Britain's burden in the Near East 'is in no way a consequence of Zionism or connected with it. If the British taxpayer objects to this burden, there is only one alternative [that is] to insist upon the Government withdrawing its forces from the Suez Canal', giving up Egypt and 'afterwards India, making room for rivals ...' (Nordau 1920d, p. 8).

²²See Nordau 1898, pp. 4–6.

²³Overview of this debate in Rogers 1992, pp. 337–54. Bernstein's 11 May 1897 contribution (in *Die neue Zeit*) had a supporting editorial note by Kautsky on the continued importance of the national question, as against Belfort Bax's claim that: 'Socialism, as such, has ... nothing to do with the aspirations of struggling nationalities towards independence ... – with the endeavours of Greece to enlarge her boundaries for the purpose of floating a new loan, with Armenian independence or with Polish patriotism' (see Bax's 'The Bourgeois Radical Movement and Socialism'). Bernstein's article and Kautsky's note were approvingly cited by

chapter 'Nationality' appeared in Arabic as a separate brochure, with the translator in the introduction, relying on Nordau's argument (of a shared language), apparently asserting that the people in Lebanon do belong to the Arab nation. A note (*Al-Muqtataf*, 61, 1 June 1922: p. 91) on this brochure incidentally designated Nordau as 'the famous socialist leader', a slip perhaps due to association with Otto Bauer.

In an interview about the United States, he hoped its people would oppose imperialism:

... America could produce a race of physical, and intellectual giants. It is in the light of this great principle that you say all men are born equal. It is the right to say all men are not born equal in the universal acceptance of the phrase."

Dark Cloud In Sight. But, doctor, don't you see dark clouds on our horizon?"

"I do," replied Nordau. "I see America dominating the Pacific by force. I see her holding the Philippines by force. I see her confronting Russia on the confines of Asia. I see all the elements of imperialism in her blood. She has not surrendered anything during her history except Cuba, and that little island she holds in the hollow of her hand. She gets all the benefit there is in the Island and has none of the responsibility. I prefer to see America dominating as a great moral power. I prefer to see her giving the fullest, freest trade to Cuba. I prefer to see her permitting and fostering the Philippines in the working out of their own destiny. Your magna charta, the declaration of independence, demands this."²⁴

A couple of references, apparently not yet familiar to Ben-Horin, document Nordau's opposition to war.²⁵ He wrote in a French anti-war periodical, edited

David Farbstein (1868–1953) in the just launched Zionist *Die Welt* (Farbstein 1897, p. 4). Farbstein wrote a couple of letters to Kautsky around the first Zionist Congress, giving an economic(-historical) lecture there (see the 2019 SUNY translation of this congress). He identified himself 'as Marxist, Social-Democrat and Zionist' (in letter 8 February 1898, see Kautsky Papers IISH).

²⁴Nordau 1903c, p. 1.

²⁵Ben-Horin 1956. Nordau highlights the psychological effects of war in his *Degeneration* (see Nordau 1895, pp. 207–8), as already noted by Vincenti (Vincenti 2021, p. 143) in her discussion of Beckett's reading of Nordau (she mentions PTSD). The word *Entartung* has

by the Marxist Charles Rappoport:

I do not believe, that war is the *Mater rerum*, the mother of all things, as the Ancients affirmed. Or, if it is a parent, it is one in the way of Saturn: it devours its children. But it is, alas, the big fact of humanity, the executor of the high works of history.

War is bestial and stupid and reason condemns it. It would be impossible

acquired a fishy connotation to some educated progressives, but for Nordau it is just a synonym for psychological 'disorder' in general (see Nordau 1895, p. 243), which Nordau divides into three, still broad, sub-groups, namely; mysticism, ego-mania (which is distinct from selfishness), and (pseudo-)realism. The influence of this popular book by Nordau likely explains why Kautsky, during his 1899 polemic against Bernstein, adopted this specific psychological meaning of the word:

'... But the word "degeneration" can also be defended. We see that suicides and the cases of insanity are increasing, the number of [involuntary] commitments shows us that degeneration is already reaching out from the cities to the countryside, which normally supplied the former with fresh blood – one can therefore very well speak of degeneration, however, not only of the working class, but of the entire population of capitalist societies. But I believe that in the sentence in question Marx wanted to depict the growing social contrast between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and that contrast is not exacerbated by the growth of physical degeneration in all classes – except in the way that it makes everyone involved more nervous' (Kautsky 1899, my translation). Kautsky is referring here to a famous passage of *Capital* where Marx uses the (non-German) term "Degradation", whereas Engels later, for the third German (1883) edition, replaced this by the German word *Entartung*, which translated back into English means "degeneration". Engels in 1883 still thought it fine to use it in its general meaning. Marx himself too used the word in its general, normal meaning, for example in *Capital*: '[E]xperience shows ... how rapidly and firmly capitalist production has seized the vital forces of the people at their very roots, although historically speaking it hardly dates from yesterday. Experience shows too how the degeneration of the industrial population is retarded only by the constant absorption of primitive and natural elements from the countryside ...' (Marx 1976, p. 380). He quotes various reports and even refers to a book-title containing that word (*Ueber die Entartung des Menschen*, Eduard Reich 1868). The word was used in its normal meaning expressing an objective, material content (of physical, mental degeneration) by Marxists like Rosa Luxemburg, Paul Lafargue, Henriette Roland Holst, Lenin and Bebel. The resolution on international labour legislation (based on drafts by Bebel and Guesde) at the 1889 founding congress of the International (which Nordau covered and cited) contains the word *degeneration*: '[T]he advance of capitalist production implies ... increasingly intensive exploitation [which] results in the political oppression of the working class, its economic subjugation, and its physical and moral degeneration' (see Mike Taber's *Under the Socialist Banner*, 2021). Nordau's 1912 article 'The Degeneration of Classes and Peoples' (in *Hibbert Journal*, already mentioned in Ben-Horin 1956, p. 68) was quoted in the SPGB's *The Socialist Standard* (March or April 1914) by a certain F.J. Webb, in a piece titled 'Degeneration', who concluded: 'The present writer reiterates the fact that it is for the working class to say what is to be the outcome of capitalism, whether society is to move forward to Socialism and a regenerated race, or back to degeneracy and a chaotic atavism. ... Civilisation is in a very sick and sorry condition. It is the task of the working class to make it whole'.

Thus the word, in its normal meaning, has a central place in the Marxist critique of capitalism's effects on the proletariat (akin to social barbarism). Nordau's (and following him, Kautsky's) specific pathological meaning of the word can be taken as just a further illustration of this general meaning: 'Some crippling of body and mind is inseparable even from the division of labour in society as a whole. However, since manufacture carries this social separation of branches of labour much further, and also, by its peculiar division, attacks the individual at the very roots of his life, it is the first system to provide the materials and the

if reason governed people. But there: it is not reason which governs them, it are the instincts, impulsions, passions, so many organic functions on which reason has little or no grip. With rational arguments one thus obtains no more against war, than against love, against jealousy, hate or hunger.

Let us harness everything to the arduous work of the education of humanity for rendering it more reasonable. The day when reason triumphs over the whole line, war will disappear. But not sooner.²⁶

And a piece, written during the war, takes a polar traveller's homecoming to the 'the world which calls itself civilized' as a framing device, noting the remarkable feature of this incident 'is not the impression which the reappearance of the polar traveler after several years' absence makes on us, but the effect which we produce on him'.²⁷

In 1920 he considered indications for the preparation of a new world war:

impetus for industrial pathology' (Marx 1976, p. 484). 'Production does not simply produce man as a commodity, the human commodity, man in the role of commodity; it produces him in keeping with this role as a mentally and physically dehumanised being. – Immorality, deformity [translated into French as *dégénérescence*], and dulling ['stultification' would also be a good translation of the German word *Hebetismus*, or 'idiotism', that is severe mental retardation] of the workers and the capitalists' (Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*). By the way, the French word *aliéné* means insane, so I just suggest perhaps Marx's concept of alienation could be given also this more concrete meaning. On the cretinization of the managers and supervisors, Sir George Mackenzie (1665, *A moral essay, preferring solitude to publick employment*, pp. 22–4) wrote:

'Consider these clouds which sit oft upon the countenance of men in Employments, their gate like to that of an disrudered Ship, and their discourse dis-joynted, and blown, as it were, all to pieces by their tempestuous passions; and ye will find such (many times) to differ but by an ace, from these who have Keepers at Bedlam: And by these disorders ye may perceive, that employment and madnes are of too near an alliance; and if the one, certainly both must be diseases, seing both have the same symptoms, and the same prognosticks. ... Is it not a madness for a rational Soul, for whom all the world was created, to observe nothing in this world, but whether another manages his Process well, with what harmony stricks another man's pulse, or how to brigue the favour of a Minion? Acts so extrinsick to the nature of an immaterial creature, such as the Soul, that if men got not money by these Employments, they would themselves condemn them as ridiculous. [... It] is most evident, that men in employment have nothing to excuse their madness, but that they are not madd, but for money or preferment. And is it not a shame for so noble a creature as Man, to be content to shew himself madd for any hire what soever'?

²⁶Nordau 1913b, p. 1 (my translation). Some other contributors to the same issue were Anatole France, Rappoport ('Les Sophistes de la Guerre'), and Parvus (the latter on 'Le Capitalisme en Turquie').

²⁷Nordau 1917b (date uncertain). Only the first page of this manuscript is viewable on a site for a 2016 Paris auction of his family estate, part of which is now held in the National Library of Israel (the specific title is not in the NLI catalogue). It would have been written likely for *The New York American* and perhaps got lost in mail, censored (with the United States' war entry) or evidently just not published.

I will cite, just to recall, the Russian chaos. The wretched country that so cruelly atones for the secular crimes of accursed Tsarism remains a vast ossuary in which murder, plunder and lust celebrate their infamous orgies. It can be foreseen, that when the 120 to 130 million Russians who will remain after the separation of the Poles, Baltic peoples and Caucasians, tire of killing each other or starving, they will cry out for a saviour. It is indicated from now on that this is Germany. Germany raises its head again; it comes out in plain sight from the prostration of defeat. Pan-Germanism rises to the surface again; militarism becomes the national religion again. And the remade, reorganised Germany will turn to Russia, decomposed, transformed into an immense quagmire: it will bring order, discipline, authority; it will restore her national and human education, raise her back to a certain degree of civilisation, and make of it a vassal that will enrich her and give her power without example in the past. And how will the new Germany, the economic, political, intellectual and moral master of regenerated Russia, use its formidable strength, which has been reconquered? Doesn't she want revenge on her victors of today? Will she not be tempted to crush Poland cornered between herself and the Russian mass? What a horrible prospect for the allies, for Europe! ...

Standing out above all, Turkey raises its Turanian hordes, exterminates the ethnic minorities of Asia Minor, boldly provokes a divided and powerless Europe, and prepares to confront it. ...

But the blackest sector of the horizon, the one most loaded with storm clouds, is the one that borders the ocean ironically called the Pacific. There Japan pursues its dream, of Asian domination and hegemony in Australian waters. All events have favoured its ambition. ... In the great war, Japan was on the side of the allies. But this does not prevent it from taking pre-1914 Germany as its model throughout. It cultivates militarism with the most fervent intensity. In all circumstances, it exercises a 'realpolitik' of implacable toughness. It wants to extend its imperialism to all of China and to all the countries of the Pacific. It is

seeking possession of Shandong, a territory inhabited by nearly 40 million Chinese, who are protesting indignantly at this annexation that violates their most elementary rights as an independent nation; but since Japan is an ally of England, it must be assumed that it has been able to secure the consent of that power for its act of violence. The United States is opposed to that. Supporting China in its resistance against the claims of Japan, they have no illusions about the consequences that their attitude may have. Many obscurities of the Americans' politics are cleared up in light of the antagonism between the United States and Japan. If the Republican Party of the Senate refuses so stubbornly to admit the ideas of President Wilson, if it is repulsed of mingling in the affairs of Europe and Western Asia, and of taking part in guarding the Rhine, and of accepting a mandate in what were once Ottoman provinces, and of assuming any responsibility to maintain the state created by peace treaties, if it agrees to having a powerful standing army and a first-rate war squad, it is because it has in mind the possibility of a conflict with Japan, which would require extreme strain from all land and sea forces of the Union, and in which, according to a very general impression in the United States, the Americans could very well find on the side of Japan, and opposite to them, the British Empire, their friend and ally of yesterday and - of today. Frightening is the idea of such a collusion. The universal upheaval would be even more formidable than the last one we just came out of. ... The League of Nations could be a sure safeguard against new wars, if it was conducted in the spirit in which it was conceived. Unfortunately, it seems that it has already been possible, to radically distort its character and energetically divert it from its purpose. It was to be the supreme court to augustly administer law and justice for all nations, and it is in the process of becoming a union of fiercely selfish interests. It was to ensure peace and the whole of humanity through new methods of affectionate understanding of all legitimate needs, of an equitable consideration of all justified claims, of universal human brotherhood and it is simply another alliance that succeeds the previous ones, against

powers considered to be enemies, on which it imposes a hostile authority and those it holds at bay with the brutal or underhanded resources of the old diplomacy.²⁸

3. Relation of militarism to working class repression

In a 1902 contribution for an Italian socialist journal he wrote on 'militarism':

Sometimes there is talk of 'a regime that rests on bayonets'. This phrase signifies a regime based on brutal force, opposed to one based on law and right. But this difference and this contrast do not exist: far from being an antinomy, there is an identity. All political regimes that exist are based on bayonets: all constitutions, all laws have as the only sanction the gendarme, and no other. The only bond that unites a capitalist society – composed as it is of classes, each of which seeks its own selfish interest to the detriment of the interest of other classes – is Authority. ... The soldier is therefore the symbol of the fundamental principle of the edifice of the state and of the society. It is impossible to overturn this symbol without the whole building immediately being shaken and collapsing soon. ... Attacking or defending militarism makes no sense at all, if it does not mean the attack or defence consciously, intentionally of the principle of authority, that is the principle of constriction [*compressione*], the principle of the struggle of class-egoisms and the triumph of the one who is better armed and organised over all those who are less so. Where is the logic of all 'those pacifists' who dream of the abolition of militarism and at the same time want to preserve the existing social order? You cannot keep the one without keeping the other. ... Militarism is the last term in a logical series of deductions, of which the first – the starting point – is the approval, admiration of the existing economic, social and political order. And the struggle against militarism is meaningless if it is not a struggle against

²⁸Nordau 1920c, pp. 301, 302–3, 304 (my translation).

the very principle which is the basis of this order. Do you want Authority? So here's the force, here's the bayonet, and finally militarism. An Authority without a concrete sanction could not sustain itself. The capitalist regime without militarism marches straight and swiftly towards collapse. For a civil society to exist without militarism, it must be based on something other than authority. Now, apart from the authority, there is no other principle except one, that is capable of creating and conserving the collective human organism: and that is solidarity. Militarism is but a screen and we discover that behind it stir those [deeper] elemental forces, whose struggle determines the evolution of history, and which can be called authority and solidarity – or selfishness and altruism – or, more simply, violence and love.²⁹

This last sentence typifies the earlier-postulated use by Nordau of non-socialist language.

4. Conception and history of class struggle. Nordau's support of it based on historical understanding, devoid of moralism

But even a 1904 piece on class struggle in (the non-socialist) *Neue Freie Presse*, without any recourse to such ambiguous language, does not make him yet an out-and-out socialist, at least to its apparently sole commentator hitherto.³⁰ Some selected passages:

It would ... be unreasonable to believe that the proletarian class will

²⁹Nordau 1902, pp. 70, 71 (my translation).

³⁰Nordau 1904b. 'Nordau recognizes the class struggle as a fact, not as a desideratum. ... Nordau contends it is erroneous to credit good will of kings or governments with the improvement in the status of labor noticeable during the last one hundred and fifty years. All these advances were made because of open violence or threats of violence. Nordau states as a historical axiom that a ruling class has never sacrificed the smallest of its privileges merely out of sympathy for the serving class' (Ben-Horin 1956, p. 145). Ben-Horin is unaware of the 1904 original, and only relies on an apparently rare copy of the 1906 Yiddish translation ('Der Klassenkampf'), separately published by (the socialist) Poale Zion (Krakow), though the article does not touch Zionism. This 1904 article coincided (within a month) with another article, on socialism (Nordau 1904a) in *The Cosmopolitan* (which perhaps also became the brochure 'O socialismo: Sua origem e progresso', Lisbon, 1911, pp. 16).

ever voluntarily cease the struggle, before it has won the victory. The alternative outcome would be the destruction, which is unthinkable however, because the class of proletarians is incomparably more numerous than the entrepreneurs, and the entrepreneurs have virtually no other power than the one which the proletarians, due to their lack in class consciousness and organisation, put at their disposal. The moment in which the proletarians are awoken to class consciousness and have organised themselves, the possibility at all of the struggle for the entrepreneurs ceases, because they, figuratively and literally, have no soldiers. ...

We know the history of slavery in the Roman Empire during a full thousand years. [... Their legal position] is exactly the same at the decline of the empire, as it had been in the time of the kingdom and the republic. [... The legal institution of the *peculium*] in the course of a thousand years shows no sign of forward development. ... Whence this inertia amidst the perpetual flow of the Roman state and legal institutions? Simply therefrom, that the slaves formed an estate [*Stand*], but not a class and did not conduct class struggle. They started it once, under Spartacus, enframed by specialists drilled for the handling of weapons and for the defiance of death. It totally misfired, and the payback was so thorough, as the victor in class struggle likes it.³¹

He brings up examples of the harrowing criminal punishments in medieval serfdom; the initially passive class struggle of the serfs in the form of escape to the city, in which a free citizenry of artisans and merchants formed that became the third estate; when the peasant-serfs sensed moments when the nobility was weakened due to wars or other events, they tried violent uprisings, such as the Jacquerie (supported by the cities – Paris under Étienne Marcel), and considerably later in Germany the movements of Hans Böhm and the Bread and Cheese folk, the Poor Conrad and the peasants' war of the Reformation era. 'Each time, when a peasant revolt was defeated, the revenge went to the most extreme limits, namely complete destruction of the rebels,

³¹Nordau 1904b, p. 16 (my translation).

up to whole depopulation of large areas'.

In England seemingly the barons voluntarily permitted their subjects a few human rights. But why? Because for their constant feuds, plunder-expeditions and wars they needed vast followers and could obtain them, only when cultivating a strong, unbroken peasantry. When, however, with Henry VIII the tumultuous feudal-era came to an end and the landowners obliged to hold peace, the peasant-friendly policy of the medieval gentry suddenly stopped too. The yeomen or tenants, who already for centuries felt as owners of the by them worked land, were brutally chased off their plots, and the descendants of the archers and the invincible infantry of Crécy and Poitiers became homeless vagrants, and the farmland transformed into livestock pastures, as the price of sheep wool stood high then and sheep farming became a good speculation.³²

³²Nordau 1904b, p. 16. Something like land enclosure already is found in the eight century BCE; "'Woe to you that build yourselves house after house, join field to field, until there is no space left free, so that you are become the sole owners of the land!" [*Isaiah* 5:8] And with his deep insight into the workings of the iron economic laws [*Isaiah*] predicts the country's steady depopulation, and the growing dearth of its produce ...' (Rosenberg 1902, pp. 38-9) – Marx, in *On the Jewish Question*, emphasised his claim that '[t]he view of nature attained under the domination of private property and money is a real contempt for, and practical debasement of, nature' with a quote from Thomas Münzer, that was inspired by the above *Isaiah* chapter; see also Rashi's comment on *Amos* 2:6 (and see verse 8:4). One criticism of Marxism (as incarnated at least in Wittfogel) is, that: 'The Marxian conception of a progression of historical stages has fostered the erroneous notion that land was not "commodified" until a postulated transition from feudalism to capitalism, a transformation that Karl Polanyi asserted did not occur in Europe until after the Middle Ages' (Ellickson, Thorland 1995, p. 376). These critics undermine the precedence of the temple-state-economy theorem: 'Abraham's insistence on paying for the land is also notable. Because accepting a gift typically obligates a donee to later repay the donor's generosity in some fashion ... [W]hen King David acquired the site of what later became Solomon's Temple from Araunah the Jebusite, he declined the alien's offer to give the land along with oxen and wood, saying, "No, but I will buy them from you for a price" ...' (Ellickson, Thorland 1995, p. 379). By the way, to me it is unclear from *Genesis* whether Esau and Jacob are fighting actually over Abraham's field (and who actually inherits it from Isaac); the Talmud (Sotah 13a) and some Midrashim add that Jacob bought (with money) from Esau the burial right (in the cave in this field) and how Esau still disputes this sale at Jacob's funeral (by insisting on presentation of the contract). Either ownership of field and burial right in it are distinct matters, or, if land ownership automatically includes burial right, *Genesis* itself lacks the information for grasping the entire Esau-Jacob dispute. The agrarian question in ancient Israel forms the first chapter in a 1927 booklet by Moishe Ilyich Lurje (alias KPD-member Alexander Emel 1897-1936), which also quoted King David's purchase. As a soviet reviewer noted: 'The prevalence of private property for ancient Israel is, of course, without doubt ...' (Erusalimsky 1929). Incidentally, Nordau's Zionist friend and Arabist scholar, the already mentioned Yahuda, argued in favour of the historicity (in *Genesis* 47:20 and following), – and of the benefits to the peasants, – of Joseph's land nationalisation in Egypt: '[T]he [biblical] narrator wants to convey that only grain crops and no others were to be taxed with the fifth, thus exempting the yield of vegetables and other products of the field,

After the yeomen, driven from home and farm, became vagrants, and in some rural regions a lack of cheap labour forces developed, they were forced to accept labour on pain of torture, slavery and execution, – cruelties against which Kett's Rebellion rose up, and though crushed, the descendants of Kett's comrades, the Puritans, Cromwell's undefeatable Ironsides, saw retribution with the execution of Charles I.

After detailing the history of the industrial proletariat since 1750, which repeats that of slavery and serfdom,³³ Nordau touches the possibility, that, perhaps, in a distant future classes will give way, and there will be only fraternal fellow-workers for a sole, common project of progress, and concludes: 'But until this golden era arises, if it ever arises, the class struggle will remain the only source of right and freedom, of human dignity and welfare, of the human race's fortification and intellectual development'.³⁴

Nordau's messages in *Avanti!* on International Workers' Day express the same sentiment:

Let the fainthearted and the blind doubt this triumph and deride those who have the certainty involved: as for the proletariat, it has no doubt.

Today it is still almost nothing: but it knows that tomorrow it will be all, aggregating all the developed elements of humanity.

The proletariat gives a splendid proof of its confidence in its own strength and in its own destinies, instituting in anticipation an official celebration, as if its virtual triumph and future is already a historical and actual fact.³⁵

From an article in 1907:

though the land belonged to Pharaoh. ... This meant a considerable concession in favour of the farmers and peasants. In adding that by Joseph's action the peasants were freed from the yoke of their skinning landlords, it becomes obvious that he appeared to the peasants as a great benefactor' (Yahuda 1935, p. 60).

³³In an essay on the disregard for human life throughout history too, he mentioned an instance of the suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871, see Nordau 1908d.

³⁴Nordau 1904b, p. 17.

³⁵Nordau 1904c (my translation).

The prospect of the advent of the fourth estate governing public affairs frightens conservatives, even those who would not oppose greater economic and social justice.

"The triumph of socialism – they groan – is the invasion of the barbarians in civilisation. It is the twilight of the culture. Humanity will then fall back into its state of primitive savagery."

A hundred times this cry of fear resounds in the incoherent writings of the half paralytic Nietzsche, and the thousand of little cretins who mimicking that insane hymn to *Übermensch* desperately repeated this cry of anguish: "Socialism is putting the civilisation in danger! Help save it!"

Vain worry, vain fear!

... Civilisation will always be well entrusted in the hands of the workers, since they will be the very hands of those who created it or who will lead it to the ultimate victory.³⁶

And a message for the first of May in 1908 (still in *Avanti!*):

We tell the workers: "The socialization of the means of production will put an end to capitalist exploitation. The worker will receive the whole fruit of their fatigue. They will know neither misery of the day, nor worry for tomorrow. They will get their just part of the goods of the earth." –

"Demagogues!" shout the reactionaries, "impostors! You lull the poor people with promises you know are unable to keep!" And addressing the people, they preach: "Have much patience and resignation in this short terrestrial life. You will be rewarded in the future life. You will go straight to heaven, and up there you will live in joy, in bliss, in ineffable happiness".

Who then is the impostor and the demagogue? Who then authorises things that they know are unable to be kept?

It is true, however, that the fools who will have believed the tale of the reactionaries, will never return to cry out their delusion...³⁷

³⁶Nordau 1907c (my translation). This article's length is a full column.

³⁷Nordau 1908a (my translation). Reprinted as 'Chi promette cosa che sa di non poter

In the Spanish weekly journal *Vida Socialista* Nordau added a twist to Livy's story of how Menenius Agrippa's fable (stomach, representing the patricians, receives the food on behalf of the body's other organs) convinced the plebeian audience to cease their general strike; after Agrippa's speech an old worker, without education, rises and counters with another, naturally cruder, fable, winning the audience back, sending the mortified Agrippa to Rome, the patricians having to accept the plebeians' demands.³⁸ The same journal reprinted his criticism of the right to work (of scabs), written apropos the French miners' strike of November 1902.³⁹

His writings available in English alone already show, that Nordau's view of class struggle is devoid both of moralism, and of historical-utopian hypotheses:

[The proletarian] knows that he produces wealth by the labor of his hands, and he is demanding his share of the riches he thus creates. But he commits the mistake of founding his demand upon all sorts of reasons that do not stand the test of criticism. There is only one single true and natural argument which he can call to his aid, and that is unanswerable: the argument that he has the power to take possession of the goods which he produces, that the rich are in the minority and unable to prevent this appropriation, consequently that he has the right to keep what he makes and to help himself to what he needs. ... But *the wages-receiver, whose mind in spite of all its Radicalism, is still entangled in the meshes of the ideas of right and morality inculcated by Capital*, he hesitates to employ this unanswerable argument, based upon the laws and instincts of nature. He prefers to seek the justifiableness of his claims in all kinds of out of the way excuses and ideas, among which Communism is the most widely accepted and believed.⁴⁰

mantenere?' in *Sempre Avanti!* (in the same issue 9 (1908), 12 (November): 26, another piece 'La solidarietà' appeared).

³⁸Nordau 1910b, p. 3.

³⁹Nordau 1910c, p. 10.

⁴⁰Nordau 1887 [1883], p. 253 (my emphasis). Most of the other English editions of this book exclude its final chapters, which deal for instance with the power of the press (repeated in Nordau 1917a). I do not mean, that Nordau endorsed amoralism (a couple of times he

This last point Nordau substantiates, in one part (I will touch his second reason later), by rejecting the notion that the village community (or united household) constitutes an example of actual (world-wide) communism. 'Just let an outsider, an individual not accepted as a member of the circle of joint owners of the common property, let him attempt to get possession of the smallest fragment of it! The entire tribe, village, Mir, etc, will rise up in arms at once to repel the intruder'.⁴¹ Such collective proprietorship came to an end with the rise of the division of labour and manifold production, when estimation of a value relation [*Werthverhältnis*] between completely different kinds of labour, and determination of a remuneration for each of the greatly-unequal labours, became necessary (whereas, in a primitive household, these could still be simply intuited and over which no doubt arose). Elsewhere too, on the basis of a description of the dismal situation in the (medieval) surviving communal-owned iron mine of Rancié (Pyrenees), Nordau criticised the specific demand for cooperatives (worker-owned companies), raised in the socialist press for French mines ('A [One] Socialist Ideal in Reality'). Perhaps suggesting an alternative demand, he pointed to the successful *state-owned* coal mines in Saarbrücken (without claiming they were socialist).⁴²

Nordau later again criticised historical-utopian theses, held by the State-socialists, that the state is communist somehow in origin:

The absurdity of Rousseau's idea that society originated in, and now rests upon, a free contract between equals has long been patent.⁴³ And the same applies to the notion that lies at the base of all Socialist

incidentally mentioned John Brown as example of a moral figure), but that he did not see socialism (or class struggle) in moral terms. For example, he wrote about Tolstoy's 'vague socialism and his morbid fraternal love' and about his muddle-headed German admirers 'who, not from sober scientific conviction, but from hysterical emotionalism, feel a leaning towards a sickly, impotent socialism, which tends principally towards ministering cheap broth to proletarians [...]' (Nordau 1895, p. 170). He appreciated anarchism's moral of individual autonomy (see Nordau 1910a, pp. 309–10). On the centenary of Proudhon he wrote an article in an Italian anarchist journal (edited by Gori and Fabbri), appraising him as a moralist (emancipation by means of justice) in the tradition of French socialism and a non-materialist, in contrast to the economic-historical conception of Marx, who offered the oppressed not liberty, but well-being [*benessere*], by the forceful means of working class domination.

⁴¹Nordau 1887 [1883], p. 254. Nordau wrote this before Plekhanov's *Our Differences* (1885) came out.

⁴²Nordau 1886c.

⁴³This is not to diminish Rousseau's greatness, see Nordau 1907b.

theories and systems that men formed themselves in communities for the execution of great works of social utility which were beyond the powers of individuals. In a future that is certainly not yet in sight men may attain such a height of mental and moral development that they will voluntarily, as the outcome of conviction, undertake some common task in which the profit accruing to any individual from his personal exertion is not at the first glance obvious. The past affords no example of free co-operation of this systematic kind. Work got done by means of severe discipline, or compulsion exercised by men or by institutions representing the crystallized will-power of former men. ... The foundation of the State was neither a contract nor a recognition of the value of rational co-operation: it was organized parasitism, the exploitation of the weak many by a ruler and the mediate and immediate servants of his power [...].⁴⁴

Nordau approvingly cites Engels' *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, on how civilised society is organised in a State, which is a machine exclusively of the ruling class, always for the essential purpose of keeping down the exploited class.⁴⁵ He writes:

Morality plays absolutely no part in the formation of the State. It has proceeded simply and solely with a view to the advantage of the supreme power.⁴⁶ ... The name 'legal State' [*Rechtsstaat*] is, like the 'organic moral personality' a mere servile invention of phrasemongering professors.⁴⁷

Claiming no communism historically existed, is not the same as claiming exploitation always has existed or that humans are purely selfish. On pages preceding his Engels-citation, Nordau acknowledges the absence of exploitation before the emergence of societies:

⁴⁴Nordau 1910a, p. 175.

⁴⁵Nordau 1910a, pp. 181-2.

⁴⁶Nordau 1910a, p. 177.

⁴⁷Nordau 1910a, p. 178. The latter in *The Theory of State* by Johann Bluntschli (1808-81).

[Humans] lived in families before they were obliged to sustain existence by effort and by art. [...With this] primitive instinct that binds the members of a biological family together, the legal conception of a family [*rechtliche Bedeutung der Familieneinrichtung*] has nothing to do. [The latter] is the outcome of the development of property [*Eigentumsbegriffes*] [...].⁴⁸ [I]t would be false to look upon [love] as the force which has formed individuals into communities, be they societies, peoples, or States. Love only created the primitive family. This was, of course, not based upon monogamy.⁴⁹ ... These groups, near one another and mixing together in this superficial way, might be called hordes, yet it is certain that there was in them no organization, nothing that limited the voluntary movements of the individual. Man could only live in this free and peaceful blood-relationship, disturbed by no serious strife save that for the possession of some women, so long as it was possible for him to satisfy his needs naturally and without labour. A change came over his relation to his fellows when he was compelled to expend skill and trouble in protecting himself against cold and want.⁵⁰ ... Woman, as the weaker, was naturally the first sacrifice. The smallest expenditure of strength and energy was required for her exploitation. Thus the family, created by the necessity of the life force, offered for centuries the easiest opening for parasitism, and does to-day in many cases.⁵¹ ... The earliest form of parasitism was exercised by man towards his wife and children, so long as they would suffer it.⁵²

Exploitation is absent in the state of nature, and even still in the early forms of society, Nordau writes (in an article on crime):

As civilisation advances and as man moves away from his primitive

⁴⁸Nordau 1910a, p. 163.

⁴⁹Nordau 1910a, p. 164.

⁵⁰Nordau 1910a, p. 165.

⁵¹Nordau 1910a, p. 166.

⁵²Nordau 1910a, p. 167. 'Man exploits the animal and plant resources that nature offers him. He himself works for his life and does not ask for it from his neighbour, except from his wife who, in the state of nature, he loves making work for him, which is the first example of the exploitation of man by man and perhaps the first indication of a criminal tendency' (Nordau 1902, p. 159).

condition, his relationship with nature and other men becomes more complicated. He can no longer ask nature itself for his subsistence in all circumstances. Nature finds itself confiscated by occupants, who monopolise it for their benefit. The others, having neither land nor water, can only obtain food second-hand, from the owners of the land and its natural resources. In this phase of civilisation the division of labour begins. Men organise themselves economically. Production differentiates and specialises. The family, the tribe, the nation, the entire species, becomes a cooperative society where each member works for all and in turn obtains from the common production enough to meet their needs. Men depend on each other, they live one from the other, the holders of the soil a little less, those who are detached from the soil a little more. However, these relationships do not constitute parasitism, because there is cooperation, there is mutualism. It is the law of "give and take". What we ask our neighbor, we pay him with a good of supposedly equal value. Parasitism only begins when, in this cooperative society, men appear who want to take without wanting to return anything, who take away from others the fruit of their effort without their consent and without any compensation, who, in a word, treat other men as a raw material from which they derive the satisfaction of their needs and their appetites of all kinds. Those who fall into this parasitism are precisely the criminals. This is the point where my theory deviates a little from the doctrine of my teacher and friend Lombroso. For him, the primitive condition of man is crime, the appearance of crime in civilisation is therefore atavism. I do not believe that man, originally, was a criminal, that is to say a parasite, everything indicates, on the contrary, that parasitism is an epiphenomenon of civilisation and is only found in organised societies. Consequently, crime is not an atavism, but a new, relatively late phenomenon, a symptom of individual and social illness, the index of a pathological condition of a differentiated society.⁵³

Nordau concludes:

⁵³Nordau 1902, pp. 159–60 (my translation). Nordau incidentally makes an anthropological precision also during his critique of Nietzsche (see Nordau 1895, p. 426).

The real unforgivable crime, perfectly avoidable and to be fought tirelessly and ruthlessly, the typical case of human parasitism out of convenient habit, not out of organic necessity, is social exploitation. And the great remedy of this order of criminality, would be an organisation of society which would make cooperation perfect, which would not allow indelicacy in exchanges, would prevent the abuse of the superiority of the strong and ensure the weak the minimum of goods essential to existence. The doctrine which tends towards the realisation of this ideal is called socialism.⁵⁴

5. Evolution of programmatic demands, conception of socialist goal, and (political, economic) methods of class struggle

The programmatic demands, at least in Nordau's 1883 *The Conventional Lies of Our Civilisation*, are nationalisation of all (including urban) land, and abolition of inheritance. The latter is, as Kautsky noted, 'under retention - or more accurately - return to individual production, a demand which belongs to the childhood of socialism and which has become totally meaningless for modern scientific socialism'.⁵⁵ This demand, raised half a century earlier by

⁵⁴Nordau 1902, p. 164 (my translation).

⁵⁵Kautsky 1884, p. 41. August Bebel wrote (6 February 1884) to Kautsky that his review was not enthusiastic enough: 'In relation to Nordau's book I am of the view that, with good conscience, though naturally with full reservation of our standpoint, it should have been recommended. I judge, however, only as a tactician, who holds himself obliged to using everything for the cause. With the exception of socialism, which Nordau has not studied, his standpoint in all other things is also our standpoint, without herewith approving its every line. The way in which the hostile press treats the book, made taking it in protection all the more necessary for us. I know of no writing in recent literature, that, excluding those from our midst, works so much into our hands as Nordau's' (Bebel 1971, p. 11, my translation). Kautsky actually discerned Nordau's familiarity with Marxism: '[...] Marxism is not a stranger to him, like many echos of one of the main representatives of this direction in France, Paul Lafargue, attest; yet nowhere in him has it come to a proper mastery of the subject matter. In the chapter on the "economic lie" he manifests for example positions which, leaning on Lafargue's *The Right to be Lazy* [1880], sound completely Marxist' (Kautsky 1884, p. 41). In the Reichstag Bebel also implied plagiarism: 'In this book judgements are cast upon modern marriage, on nobility and monarchy, and on even on property, [so] that everything which Social-Democracy has said about these, can be no worse. When I first read the book and namely its chapter on modern marriage, I repeatedly clasped my hands over my head and said to myself: if your book *Woman and Socialism* [1879] were not written four years before Nordau's, you would have needed to accept, that they would accuse you of plagiarism; because entire sections [of Nordau's book] read, as if they were taken from the book you

the Saint-Simonians Bazard and Enfantin, entails that an individual can own means of production, and upon death these, with everything accumulated (like stocks), revert to the community (apparently are nationalised). Nordau's moderate demand follows from his above-referenced second objection to the 'excuse' of communism, namely that hoarding of resources or possessiveness lies in the nature of animals. This banal objection was disposed of in one Russian edition (1907) of Nordau's book. Its translator, a certain A.V. Chernjavskij, was a socialist (probably a Socialist-Revolutionary), as his introduction (titled '1789-1905', pp. xv, written February 1907) suggests. He titled the book *The Lie of Pre-Socialist Culture* [*Lozh' predsotsialisticheskoy kultury*] on the grounds that the book is an 'agony of the old world'.⁵⁶ In two critical footnotes (pp. 306, 316) Chernjavskij explained that Nordau should have distinguished between (the accumulation of) property of personal consumption-items and of means of production; and further that his agrarian program is close to, but not as consistent as, the Socialist-Revolutionary Party's. There are no means of production in the animal kingdom, and as for items of personal consumption, communism does not seek to collectivise them (so Nordau kicks in an open door). As for the intermediate category of non-perishable goods (like houses), many species utilise these objects jointly (ants, bees, crows, beavers), on which communism merely seeks to limit the right of property.⁵⁷

According to civil rights activist Thomas Fortune though, Nordau's concern in this book was not really programmatic at all:

Nordau is not a dreamer, he is an iconoclast. He is evidently a scholar thoroughly conversant with the learning of the times. ... While

composed' (13 February 1888, *Verhandlungen des Reichstags*). As for Lafargue's work, Nordau indeed was familiar with it, as he fondly remembered in an article on the eight-hour day: '[...] un folleto titulado "El derecho a la pereza". Fuimos muchos los que aplaudimos al autor y aclamamos ese derecho' (14 September 1919 *La Nación*, cited from second-hand account, the manuscript in French 'La journée de huit heures' should be in the NLI). But Nordau expressed his own ideas (such as criticism of the excessive labour times of workers) already in a 1880 book, published shortly before Lafargue's work came out.

⁵⁶He fleshed out Nordau's invocation of *Daniel* (5:26 - 'God has numbered the days of your kingdom and put an end to it'), adding *Ezekiel* 39:10 - '[T]hey will plunder those who plundered them and loot those who looted them, declares the Sovereign Lord'. Helpfully he came up with many titled sub-headings, but only during the first half of the book (online at nli.org.il).

⁵⁷Chernjavskij (p. 306) refers to Anton Menger's *Neue Staatslehre*.

disavowing Socialism, and repudiating Communism as utopian, he is still more radical and ultra in his arraignment of our social arrangements than Louis Blanc or Karl Marx. He would begin, apparently, with Anarchy and rebuild society upon other and more equitable bases. He does not outline for us the new condition, but like Moses he sees a Promised Land, which some fortunate Aaron [*sic*] may explore. The book can only be properly appreciated by being carefully read.⁵⁸

Nordau in this book in fact disavowed anarchy too, but Fortune's impression is understandable, also given for example Nordau's critique of (the practice of) parliamentarism. He demanded 'the radical simplification of the present machinery of government': 'It is not true that all our existing police regulations are needed to protect our life and property. In the mining camps of the West and in Australia, the individuals took their protection into their own hands, forming the so-called "Vigilance Committees", and the most model order prevailed without any official machinery'.⁵⁹

Elsewhere Nordau envisioned:

When exploitation ceases to be a remunerative employment for the privileged people [*Vorzugsmenschen*], all the state and social institutions, created and developed in order to make that exploitation easy or even first possible, will gradually crumble away, and finally disappear, without the need of any violent revolution to destroy them. ... If there is no army, diplomacy has no longer any function. ... The course of legal development will show considerable divergence from the Roman conception of property. The principle that no law may be retrospective will not be maintained as obstinately as it is at present. Excessive fortunes will doubtless be attacked with searching questions as to their origin, and rules of equity framed with the greatest subtlety, so as to track the exploitation of the weak in all its most secret windings and retreats, to prevent it by penalties, and ruthlessly deprive those who

⁵⁸Fortune 1885, p. 2.

⁵⁹Nordau 1887 [1883], pp. 160-61.

exercise it of their gains.⁶⁰

In 1915, writing about trusts, Nordau does envision a total (and international) collectivisation of the means of production:

Now imagine the whole organisation of the trusts no longer for the benefit of a few billionaires, but rather the hundreds of thousands of workers employed in their factories, and one has the dream of scientific socialism in living realisation before oneself. What does the worker-proletariat suffer from? From anarchic competition. Why can wages never rise above a minimum that is only sufficient for the lowest standard of living with which a son of civilisation of a given cultural level still is willing to be content? Because when this minimum is exceeded in the slightest, the reserve army of the unemployed immediately offers itself cheaper. This constant, insurmountable pressure on wages will cease when anarchy and deadly competition are replaced by organisation and cooperation. The total needs of consumers are generally known. The increase in demand is regular and its law found without special effort. One knows beforehand what quantities of the goods in question have to be produced. The work is distributed to all available hands. Nobody, who can perform it, remains unemployed. The remuneration for the work is set at a level, that allows the worker to live in dignity and, without exuberance, allows carefree satisfaction of needs. Only deliberate laziness is condemned to deserved misery, without right to pity. That is the economic goal towards which socialism strives; the attainment of this goal is the precondition for the passage toward the moral goals that round out the socialist program. But how is it to be achieved? The proletariat has neither the method nor the means to establish in the foreseeable future an organisation which, if it is to be effective, must cover the entire globe and sequentially all branches of human economic activity. But what the proletariat is not yet able to achieve, capital can do. The proletarians are poor, they are not in

⁶⁰Nordau 1910a, pp. 344, 345 (my correction).

possession of the statistical facts, they have the laws and existing institutions against them. The trusts are rich, they are wonderfully informed, they make the laws which they need. In this way the trusts give an example. They become educators of the proletariat. Let us let the billionaires reign! Let us let them build up their tremendous piles of gold! The party will not last forever. They obviously have an inkling, of who their heirs are; their charitable foundations are pay offs for the aspirants, who are to curb their impatience. The proletarians will watch how it is done; they will quietly and diligently learn and the moment will come, where they simply lay hands on the existing, well-developed, smoothly working organisation, say goodbye to the billionaires in all serenity and love with a retirement salary, and in their place put an elected workers' committee. Then the trusts will not work for a few moral dinosaurs, but rather for all of their heads and arms [white- and blue-collar workers] and subsequently for the whole of humanity. The trust-dynasts in twirling are preparing the future for themselves. They are the outermost blossom of the capitalist economy. The history of the globe teaches, that in all geological epochs every animal-species brought forth its mightiest forms instantly before its extinction. It is one of the many artistic traits of nature, that it closes each development-series with an unsurpassed monstrosity.⁶¹

This might sound like complacency in the prospects of socialism, taking it for granted as true or as something inevitable, hence pleading in its favour, particularly with over-zealous arguments, is unnecessary.⁶² We have seen that Nordau upheld class struggle as the way of achieving any progress. The idea of socialism does seem self-evidently true to him. For instance, during an evaluation of the originality of Lombroso's criminal anthropology (which

⁶¹Nordau 1915b, pp. 204–7 (my translation). This passage is known to Nordau-commentators (Ben-Horin 1956). On preceding pages Nordau detailed how trusts are the scourge of mankind; how sugar and tabak monopolies drove the American war over Cuba and the Philippines, the crushing of workers' resistance with an oblique reference to the repression of the 1894 Pullman strike (Nordau 1915b, p. 200), and so on.

⁶²Criticism of this reformist conception (of automatic transition or "growing into" the future socialist society), based on the growth of cartels, trusts, big banks and state economic functions, can be found in Kautsky's 1918 *Sozialdemokratische Bemerkungen zur Uebergangswirtschaft* (pp. 159–60).

Nordau accepted as true, and which he asserts in its defense, does also recognise the truism that social conditions, like poverty, play a role in crime), he picked as example socialism (as well as the history of the idea of Italian unification, – which he evidently also accepted as a positive), illustrating the difficulty of tracing the exact development of an event, elaboration of a truth, idea or scientific theory:

There seems to be no good-faith controversy possible over the fact that Karl Marx is the father of the present socialism, incarnated in political parties and parliamentary groups. By contrast, who dares trace the socialist idea since its origins upto our times? Who is audacious enough to trace with certainty the priority of the theory of collectivism, of the idea of nationalisation of the land and the means of production, of the conception of the struggle of classes? What erudition is sure enough to fix with authority the first appearance in [recorded] literature of the proletarian demands, of the polemic against capitalism, of the aspiration of social justice, of the affirmation of human solidarity? Before Marx, there was Saint-Simon and his school, before him there was Babeuf, then the peasants' revolt in England and in Germany, and the communist uprising of the Anabaptists of Münster, and the Jacquerie of France, and further, more distant, the preaching of the Gospel, and the objurgation of the Prophets of Israel, and the abolition of private debts – the *Seisachtheia* – of Solon, and the practical communism of Sparta [...].⁶³

In one of his first pieces for the *Neue Freie Presse* (so writing for a non-socialist audience), Nordau takes for granted that socialism as a faith will prevail, like Christianity did, despite absurdities in its doctrine (such as its alleged notions of the big event and economic collapse [*großer Abend oder großer Kladderadatsch*], which are the equivalent of the Last Judgement):

The sole, all-displacing topic of the times, also of the past year, remains still the socialist movement.⁶⁴ ... Wage-increase is merely one of the

⁶³Nordau 1908b, p. 247 (my translation).

⁶⁴Nordau 1896, p. 2.

means, the most obvious, towards the goal; but the goal is incomparably wider, higher, more intellectual: the goal, is enforcement of hypothetical happiness claims. ... On the stage of intellectual development, where the masses even in the most civilised countries today stand, the philosophical and sociological errors of the socialist doctrine cannot be recognised by the mass of people; they [these beliefs] must thus necessarily work precisely so, as if they were truths.⁶⁵

... [Liberal critics of the socialist doctrine such as Eugen Richter and Julius Wolf] maybe are right, when they call it absurd. But absurdity has never prevented the spread and continuance of an intellectual movement, which encompasses a sufficient measure of affective elements. The present government-power, which is exercised by a privileged class in the name of a monarch, obeys a necessity, when it seeks to destroy socialism, since it senses, that its life is threatened, and defends itself as a strongman, who does not want to die. The masses obey another necessity, when they nevertheless turn to socialism, since it pledges them, what seems indispensable to them: moral exaltation, self-respect [*Selbstherrlichkeit*], easier life, in a word: feelings of pleasure [*Lustgefühle*], which accord with the stage of development reached by them. Who will win in this struggle, is not doubtful to me. One thing I know for certain, and this should reassure everyone: the absurd is harmless, since it cannot realise itself. Human nature remains always what it is; what in a doctrine goes against human nature, remains also with the victory of the doctrine a mere word, which afterwards is given a foreign, more plausible meaning or one does not seek to give a meaning at all. ... How the transformation of a – regarded as impossible – theory will occur into a practical system of state and society, that the content of world history in the next centuries will determine. And that this transformation begins in front of our eyes, that gives our days world-historical significance.⁶⁶

⁶⁵Nordau 1896, p. 3.

⁶⁶Nordau 1896, p. 4 (my translation). Already discussed in Ben-Horin 1956, p. 155.

6. Concrete historical instances of class struggle (1905 revolution in Russia, etc.)

Nordau did not ignore the action of the mass, and gave harsh but sympathetic criticisms for revolutionary attempts. 'What were the Italian republics of 1848, what was the Spanish republic of 1868, and what is the French republic of 1870, but monarchies with vacant throne, monarchies, who grant themselves the pastime of a republican masquerade'?⁶⁷

[A genuine republic] is inherently incompatible with hereditary privileges and distinctions, with the enormous influence wielded by accumulations of capital and monopolies, with the power of an army of office holders and with any restrictions to the free liberty of thought, speech and action of the grand masses of the people. ... An exclusively political revolution, changing merely the form of the government from monarchical to republican, and leaving undisturbed the existing conditions of society, philosophy and economy, of which the monarchy is the logical sequence, has neither sense nor foundation.⁶⁸

He wrote an article ('Un Pouvoir naissant: le Syndicalisme') on the power of self-organised mass strikes in April 1911 in *La Revue* (volume 90). It was reported in the 29 July edition of Magón's anarchist *Regeneración* (incidentally, perhaps so named, having in mind Nordau's analysis of degeneration), and republished (in abbreviation) under the title 'Syndicalism - A World Power' in *The Agitator* (15 December 1911), a US revolutionary syndicalist paper. Nordau drew out the broader - indeed world-historical - implication of 1910 French railway strikes, seeing in what he calls 'syndicalism' the heralding of nothing less than the beginning of a new epoch in human history (citing Goethe's words, apropos the French revolutionary army's first victory in 1792).⁶⁹ Through a historical analysis of the socialist movement in France, he explained the emergence of the CGT in opposition to

⁶⁷Nordau 1887 [1883], p. 82 (my correction - the English edition is not always a reliable translation).

⁶⁸Nordau 1887 [1883], pp. 82, 84-5.

⁶⁹Discussed by Ben-Horin 1956, p. 156. This article is included in his 1915b book in German.

the socialists, – one point in the rift being the Dreyfus affair, – but warned of the unions' political indifferentism and narrow economism, which meant a grave danger to the republic.⁷⁰

His eventual stance on Bolshevism was just one of bland rejection, as in his short comment to a query from the *New York Times* (9 March 1919): 'It is possible that there is some idea at the bottom of it but there is so much blood over it that it is impossible to perceive it'.⁷¹ But his initial attitude (until summer of 1918), if it was written down, would be in the Argentinian *La Nación*, a paper for which he still wrote at the time.⁷² One piece published there, written in July 1920, touches on the Polish-Soviet War, as part of a general overview of the continuing bloodshed in the world since 1914:

The optimistic fools want to convince themselves that the storm has passed and the world has finally returned to its normal state. ... Nothing has changed yet. [... T]he old world offers from one end to the other the horrible spectacle of an immense carnage, of a boundless field of ruins, awash in human blood and bathed in tears.

Central Europe is today almost at the same point as it was in 1915. The Russia of the Soviets is at war with almost all the countries that have separated from what was the empire of the tsars. The so-called Red Armies [*ejércitos llamados rojos*], of more than a million soldiers, and whose number is increasing day by day, are campaigning against

⁷⁰See Nordau 1909b, pp. 2, 3. On the other hand, he also criticised the French socialist party for its state-bureaucratic tendency (as a state within a state) in an article 'Le dangereux écueil' ('The dangerous pitfall'), date and place of publication unknown (item lot no. 140 of Paris 2016 auction of Nordau's manuscripts, 8 pp., only first page viewable online), perhaps for *La Nación* (Buenos Aires).

⁷¹Ben-Horin 1956, p. 149.

⁷²Not accessible to this researcher, but the listed manuscripts on the 2016 auction site (in lot 162), that became articles in *La Nación* around 1917, are titled: 'Un incident de la révolution russe', 'Crépuscule des Rois', 'Fabrication de rois' (dated 17 August – maybe Nordau 1918 is a reprint), 'Royauté moderniste', 'Protectionisme' ('Solidaridad e interdependencia', 9 July 1917, p. 5), 'Grèves et mobilisation', 'La violence et le droit', 'La famine de papier' (1 october), 'La conscience d'un homme', 'La faillite du libéralisme' (The Bankruptcy of Liberalism), 'Les détachés' (on Roald Amundsen's North Pole expedition), and 'La danse sur le volcan'. Some of Nordau's articles written during the war in *La Nación* are referenced in Vega 1999, p. 163; 'Los mil y un días de guerra', 10 June 1917, p. 5; 'Los enriquecidos. Un de las calamidades de la guerra', 21 November 1917, p. 5 (against war speculators, reprinted in *La Nación* of Santiago de Chile, 6 December, p. 1). Prior to 1900, some of Nordau's contributions are perhaps listed in *Artes y letras en "La Nación" de Buenos Aires, 4 enero 1870 - 31 diciembre 1899* (Fondo Nacional de las Artes, 1968).

Poland, allied with the Ukrainians. The battle front stretches almost without interruption from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. ... Each new day brings new battles, new defeats, new formidable victories. Yesterday's opuluous and flourishing cities are stormed, evacuated, recovered, given over to slaughter, looting, burning, sometimes swept from the surface of the earth. ... The Poles are withdrawing, the Russians advance ... threatening [Poland's] new existence, which so far has shown little dignity because of its active bestial militarism. Similar events occur on the borders of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, throughout the whole of Ukraine, in the Caucasus, in Georgia, in Azerbaijan, in Siberia. Day after day the press registers without comment violent encounters, disbanded army corps, captured regiments, exterminated battalions, and nobody pauses at that, nobody thinks that this means the cruel death of thousands and thousands of human beings.

In Hungary perhaps there is still no real war, but there is mobilisation [and] there is inside the White Terror, torture and mass murder of men accused of having participated in the brief communist movement of 1919, the suppression of all freedoms, the disregard of all the laws that guarantee the elementary rights of man and the citizen, the absolute reign of an unbridled soldiery that wallows in orgies of slaughter, rape and robbery. ...

In Anatolia, Turkish nationalists, following Kemal's orders, boldly ignore the peace treaty signed in San Remo on April 24 and continue the war... The sinister carnage ... also reigns in Persia, on the borders of India, makes inroads into India itself, as on the occasion of the abominable extermination of several hundred Indians in Amritsar, which has been severely censured by the English Parliament and which has served its author, General Dyer, expulsion from service. True, this just measure, which honours England, does not bring a single one of the dead back to life... And much closer to the centre of the British world empire, in Ireland, what a distressing situation! There is also war there, and the most deplorable of all, the civil war. ...

And outside the current battlefields, far from them too, what an existence of peoples and individuals! Since the end of antiquity and the beginning of medieval feudality, humanity had never known a slavery like the one it is suffering now. Freedom is an increasingly blurred memory of an increasingly distant past. It has ceased to exist, as well as human respect, as well as the most elementary right of personality. All the most violently arbitrary measures that it was thought necessary to take during the great war, all the most cynically brutal military and administrative tyrannies still remain in full force. Arrogant and irresponsible police reign at all. Each country is a prison subject to the usual regulations in those establishments. The ordinary citizen, who is not protected by some powerful influence, is a forced man exposed to the most mortifying humiliations. Borders are closed everywhere, and the unfortunate traveler who seeks to cross them does so, when he can, under the conditions in which the chains of galley slaves once passed under the review of his commitres. The alien is outside the law: they harass him, reject him, cage him, torment him, dishonor him like a convicted criminal or dangerous animal. And the peoples tolerate this treatment when a single instant of clear and straight reflection, a single outburst of reasonable will, would be enough to shake off such a hateful despotism, to restore the dignity of the human person, to make this place habitable again.

In truth, the tyrant who occupy ministries and administrative offices everywhere, and cling to the omnipotence usurped in favour of the world war, are right when they deeply despise the vile and cowardly human herd, which accepts without resistance, without rebellion, such treatment.⁷³

An exposition of Nordau's stance on the Russian revolution can, however, be found in his detailed description of the 1905 revolution. At least Nordau does not evince an anti-socialist attitude.

⁷³Nordau 1920e, pp. 279–82 (my translation).

From 1 to 8 September [1905] the government let the Armenians be slaughtered by the Tatars [Azeris] in Baku and surroundings, and, in turn, from beginning December let the Tartars be wiped out by the Armenians. From 1 to 5 November in South and Western Russia in 300 big and small cities the Jews and students were delivered to killers, ordered from above. Against a government, which maintains itself with such means, a broken-back doctrinaire opposition offered obviously a laughably disproportionate protection. The leadership of the resistance movement passed from the hands of the Zemstvos and the Dumas to the social-revolutionary organisations. The gentlest constitution-pace was accelerated to the storm and stress. ... An eight-day general uprising, which in the last week of October brought the entire transportation and economic life of the Empire to a halt, gave the workers the consciousness of their power. ... [O]n 30 October the tsar set out a new decree, which again promised a constitution and guarantee of the most basic human and civil rights. Given that nobody took this talk serious anymore, the revolution advanced, arming and organising itself [and] the general decomposition went further ahead, the government dropped the mask of benevolence and ordered on 16 December the arrest of the editors of six Petersburg papers and the workers' leaders within its reach. A new uprising, street fighting in Petersburg and Moscow, dynamite attacks against troops and police are the response of the people against this attempt by the autocrats of tightening the reigns again. ... The near future is very gloomy. The government still has enough power to spill blood. ... But it will not get the last word. The revolution will triumph and under all the greater frights, the longer the struggle will have lasted, the greater efforts and sacrifices it will have cost.

Still nine months ago Russia could be pacified with a reasonably liberal constitution. This is now over. The revolution, which is ongoing and can no longer be stopped, will not leave one stone on another of the edifice of the state and society. The peasants take the land and soil back, which the tsars since Peter I snatched away from them and assigned to the nobility or crown, and would rather let themselves be cut to pieces, than

surrender the land. The proletarians are heading toward a tragic disappointment. For they dream of the socialist future-state with collective ownership, and for this the practical formula has not yet been found also in much more advanced countries. The resolution will probably be, that the urban proletariat, which has not been long uprooted, still is familiar with the plow, will return to the enlarged fields and the artificial young big industry will shrink, perhaps entirely wither. The Russian unitary state is a thing of the past. ... Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians stand in the field against Germans and Russians. The national antagonism is mixed with economic motives. The revolt of hitherto subordinate tribes against the ruling ones is simultaneously the revolt of the small against the big landowners. ... The Russia proper has no internal foothold, because its people never had a unitary state consciousness. Great Russia is a collection of villages, who constitute as many peasant republics. ... It is a matter of indifference to the individual Mir, that border regions fall off the Empire, that the Empire itself disintegrates into little village counties [...]. ... Little Russia [Ukraine], Belarus, the Cossack region are nearer a drive toward contruction of a state and national consciousness. But their strivings toward political new creations will not be postulated and facilitated by a historical tradition.

But also for the border countries striving toward independence from Russia the separation would not be an unmixed fortune. ... In the Baltic provinces Estonians and Lithuanians will not tolerate each other long and the interference of Germany in their affairs would not be avoidable. The same sword of Damocles would hang over Poland's head [...].⁷⁴

In the aftermath, late 1906:

Still during the Duma's sitting, the government began its systematic struggle against the revolution, which it continues with perseverance. The method consists of sending officially organised killer bands against

⁷⁴Nordau 1905b, pp. 3-4 (my translation). This is just an excerpt.

the Jews and under torture first plunder and then slaughter the defenseless victims, preferably old people, women and children. The thieves and killers operate under the protection of the police and the troops like in Bialystok, or the soldiers implement the murdering, desecration and robbing themselves like in Siedlce. More careful than against the Jewish old people and children the government proceeds against socialist workers and rebellious peasants, because in front of shooting and bomb-throwing they and their murder-servants have ample fear. All the same it often grabs from these groups unlucky wretches, who it lets condemn to death by shooting or hanging by so-called field-courts under parody of the forms of a juridical procedure. Each condemned, as it lets exultantly announce in its organs, was to have been a leader, a main organiser of the revolution. The revolutionaries laugh merely about this storytelling. An organisation exists just as little as leaders. The free-spirited elements have in this enormous country not yet been able to closely join and structure themselves, there exist only loose groups, and basically every revolutionary still acts on their own accord. So much is certain, that the government as of yet has not caught a single real terrorist, regarded as such by their comrades.⁷⁵...

The [European] cabinets, who morally and materially support the Russian ruler, in their blind reactionary obstinacy do not know what they do. They do not see, that they create a community between themselves and the Tsarist despotism, that in its inevitable downfall they will be drawn along; they do not see, that by their benevolent indulgence for the hideous crimes they charge blood guilt on their own skin and forever forfeit the right of supporting weak governments in the name of civilisation and humanity; they do not see, that in every country countless stern eyes follow their scandalous doings and judge them, their system, their moral, the whole order, which they incorporate. On the day when the Russian people will have overcome its stranglers – and this day is despite the momentary superiority of the government and despite the support of its foreign political and financial accomplices

⁷⁵Nordau 1907a, p. 7 (my translation).

close – on this day in Europe still many other things will collapse besides the Tsarist despotism.⁷⁶

In 1903, writing in the socialist *Avanti!*, Nordau had outlined the context of the Kishinev pogrom, namely the rapid industrialisation in Russia, which, as it does elsewhere, monstrously enriched some enterprises (or exploiters [*fruttatori*]):

At first it is a wonderful idyll for the capitalists. ...

But soon things change. The proletarians of the new industry are recruited from two classes of the population: from the Russian peasantry and from the Jews of the city, in which they are allowed to stay. Jews have the brightest intelligence, the most developed sense of solidarity, an education superior to that of their Orthodox comrades. They are the first to realise the situation. Among them there are those who have traveled, who therefore know the world and modern life, who have read socialist writings, and possess also the great experience of the German workers' organisation. They make socialist propaganda. They organise themselves. They claim their rights. They strike. They demand a reduction in working hours, an increase in salaries, respect for their human dignity by the capitalists and by their clerks. They become the educators of their Orthodox comrades. They thus tear themselves away from under the knout, and at the end of a few years the government, whose violent intervention is always solicited by the terrified capitalists, finds itself in the presence of a highly organised proletariat, aware of its power, determined to fight against both its political and economic oppressors. ...

Since then the government has been dominated by a single idea: destroy this ferment of revolutionary ideas, paralyse these educators of the Russian worker, and take revenge if their extermination is impossible. And herewith it is organising the massacre, not of the organised Jews, –

⁷⁶Nordau 1907a, p. 8 (my translation). I could not consult Nordau's relevant contribution on the subject of Russia in *Sempre avanti: Rivista popolare di socialismo per gli umili e per pratici* (volume 10, issue no. 1, 15 January 1909, – a rare volume held in a few Italian libraries), incidentally mentioned in a footnote by soviet editors of a Plekhanov volume.

these would not be treated like the poor little shopkeepers and isolated artisans of Kishinev, – but of the large urban agglomerations of Jews, who are completely outside the labour movement. Women, children, old people, peaceful street vendors are punished for the crime of the Jewish industrial proletarians!

Thus, it is hoped to intimidate them with this abominable means, by giving them an indirect, but therefore more effective lesson. All of the six million Jews in Russia are hostage to the Russian government for the 80,000 organised Jewish socialists. It casts them to extermination [*vota allo sterminio*], to the most infernal torture, if the Jewish workers persist in following the socialist doctrine and above all in spreading it to their Orthodox comrades. ...

Those killed in Kishinev were without knowing it the martyrs of Russian freedom. In them, the government wanted to strike at the revolution which it sees will appear on the horizon, and of which it is frightened. [It] intended to curb the progress of socialism. It is this aspect of the Kishinev massacres that I intend to highlight. It must interest the proletariat of both worlds [in Russia and abroad], also when the fate of martyred Jews should leave it indifferent.⁷⁷

In Nordau's essay on socialism in France, he still held out better prospects for the spread of socialist ideas in Russia (than in France):

Communist tendencies would be understandable in Russia, where the abolition of serfdom by the Emperor against the wishes of the nation's nobility proved that the will of a single man is more powerful, than the right of ownership, whereby in uneducated minds the firm concept of property necessarily had to be shaken and confused; it is an entirely

⁷⁷Nordau 1903b, p. 1 (my translation). Apropos the Beilis trial, see Nordau 1913d. In another article Nordau rejects the claim about Jews, that their 'only role in the national economy was usury. That accomplished type of a learned ninny, that incarnation of stupid pedantry, and of silliness packed with vain reading and incoherent quotations, Professor (of course!) Werner Sombart, has expounded this preposterous theory, somewhat, modernised, and clothed in pretentious language in two heavy volumes [*Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (1911) is just one volume, and *Die Zukunft der Juden* (1912) a booklet], the falseness and malignity of which I exposed in an American review when they were first published' (Nordau 1920b, p. 11). I could not locate such article (but he refuted the same notion elsewhere).

sensible reasoning to say to oneself: 'Yesterday I belonged to my landlord and today I am taken away from him; today the fields and forest still belong to him, can we not take these too away from him tomorrow?' This would be all the more logical to ask and corresponding to the Russian peasant's train of thought, given the fact that communism is deeply rooted in the Slavic national consciousness and is sympathetic to the Slavic mind, due to the common property of the village marks and the 'united households' still existing in many Slavic tribes (Croats, Slavonians).⁷⁸

Nordau's essay dispelled the anti-socialist fearmongering about a communist spectre among Frenchmen:

Finally there is the Commune uprising of 1871, this great argument of those who accuse France of communism. About this black date it is better not to speak; because above all the first leaders and ringleaders of the movement were again people like Rochefort, Pyat, Courbet, aristocrats, brilliant writers, artists, men of the diamant ring, white linen and champagne party, and then the movement itself was a predominantly political, not socialist one. The people of Paris were overwrought and its mental balance disturbed by six months of unheard of commotion and deprivations; the national parliament and government did everything to justify the suspicion that a restoration of the monarchy or the empire was being planned, which Paris was resolutely set on not tolerating. The socialist moment played into the uprising only later. The confused heads, which lead it, were evidently guided by the mere consonance of words, to pass communalism over into communism, and thus it is merely by dint of a monstrously, grotesque pun, of the most colossal and disastrous wordplay history ever made, that this political uprising got a socialist-communist coating at all. [... T]he overwhelming majority of the country and even of Paris remained calm and sensible.⁷⁹

⁷⁸This piece was written in May 1875 for the *Pester Lloyd* ('Der Kommunismus in Frankreich'), included in Nordau 1880, pp. 238-9 [p. 264 in first edition] (my translation, also cited in Ben-Horin 1956, p. 161. Compare his view on the *Mir* in 1883, cited above.

⁷⁹Nordau 1880 [1875], pp. 237-38 (my translation). In Paris in the summer of 1876 Nordau

Workers strive for economic emancipation, but this social movement is not a danger to the state nor to society; it lacks all the frights which accompany it in other countries.⁸⁰

The European milksops should look more closely! What they take to be an army of petroleurs are but a few poorly-paid background actors, who appear on France's political scene on command of the legitimist clerical and bonapartist directors. They can sleep calmy, out of France their beloved firecrackers pose no danger.⁸¹

He saw no prospect for revolution in Germany.

It is not in its manner. Above all, do not cite 1848. It was a simple bout of drunkenness produced by a swig of French drink - the wine of the

became personally acquainted with an experienced revolutionary (of 1830, 1832, February and June 1848, December 1851, 'the soul of all conspiracies that subverted Paris during the last years of the Empire', September and October 1870), who was a noted barricade-builder, but shunned official posts or titles. Nordau described him in sufficient detail (for example, born around 1810) for potential identification (in the chapter 'Zwei Revolutionäre' in Nordau 1881), using the pseudonym 'Père Gregoire'.

⁸⁰See Nordau 1880, p. 242.

⁸¹Nordau 1880, p. 247 (my translation). Nordau in 1881 became the French correspondent for the Berlin *Vossische Zeitung*, an important position, held before also by the socialist Carl Hirsch (see Marx 1992, p. 112). Staying at Charles Longuet's house (editor of *La Justice*), Marx wrote to Engels, that Hirsch was the source behind an attack in *La Justice* on Nordau for alleged Gallophobia. Hirsch decried Nordau's reception of an award by Jules Ferry (an irrelevant fact, as it dates to summer 1879 when Ferry was only minister of education, and decorated participants of *all* nationalities of an International Literary Congress), and his attack tied into *La Justice's* campaign against Prime Minister Ferry, trying to depict Ferry as Bismarck's lackey. In reality Nordau, for instance while reporting from Germany for the *Pester Lloyd*, criticised the Bismarck-cult (22 March 1874 article, mentioned by Nordau-scholar Hedvig Ujvári) .

In this capacity Nordau reported also the French labour movement. An example of routine coverage was the September 1882 French socialist congress and split (morning-edition 5 and 6 October). More significantly (as to his general familiarity with socialist politics) was the week-long coverage of the 1889 international workers' congresses, that launched the Second International (Nordau 1889), with a special note on (fellow-Hungarian) Leó Frankel. On the interplay of the French bourgeoisie's secularism with its struggle against socialism see Nordau 1886b. Apropos the suppression of a CGT strike around Paris, he lambasted the French Republic's absence of social reforms for workers, whose introduction would be the only way to avoid industrial unrest (see Nordau 1908c). Nordau's cablegram in the *Vossische Zeitung* of 13 February 1914 (evening), apropos the appointment of hardliner Goremykin as Russian prime minister, notes, that French papers which 'draw their Russian news from Russian revolutionary sources' predict, that his policy (against the Duma) will provoke 'severe internal disturbances'. At the precipice of world war, Nordau reported the position of the French socialist party (morning 29 July 1914), and he eulogised Jaurès (Nordau 1914c).

February Revolution. It passed quickly and only left a hangover for a certain time.

No. There can be, here and there, an impulse [*coup de tête*], but a revolution, that is to say an organised, disciplined movement, with a leader, a plan, a goal, a method, – no. At most there can be riots in Munich against a hike in the price of beer.

The discourse in the Reichstag means nothing. It does not signify a pin. The socialists would like to establish the sovereignty of the people, but the bourgeoisie does not particularly care. ... The few radical ideologues of Germany do not count in the collective life of the nation.⁸²

The working class in England still had an unfinished political task. In his chapter on the 'upper ten thousand' Nordau concluded:

The rule of the aristocracy is thus founded on the broadest basis and a rebellion against it on a peaceful road is impossible. The heirs govern the country, give it laws, represent it abroad, command its army and fleet; the younger sons permeate the entire administrative machine, adjudicate law, control the universities and the church and in this way subjugate the administration, jurisprudence, science and national consciousness to the aristocratic influence.⁸³

The Englishman, who goes to the colonies as a plebian, reproduces the caste system there, treats the races there as he was treated at home by the upper ten thousand.⁸⁴

But perhaps I incidentally take the cause for the effect. Perhaps the patrician system dominates in the colonies, not because the Englishman

⁸²Nordau 1914b, p. 559 (my translation).

⁸³Nordau 1880, pp. 63–4. In this book on European countries, although subtitled 'culture studies', Nordau did wax about the national character, but later he rejected this approach: 'The psychology of nations, which was believed by its founders, Lazarus and Steinthal, to be a new and fruitful science, is as fallacious as the psychology of the crowd. [...] The notion of a special national individuality and physiognomy is, however, entirely in the air, one of those facile generalizations that lie at the root of so many errors and prejudices' (Nordau 1910a, pp. 109, 111; see also in Nordau 1915a) – pointed out already by Ben-Horin 1956, p. 65.

⁸⁴See Nordau 1880, p. 72.

is an inveterate aristocrat, but rather the aristocratic principle has been able to maintain itself in England, because it also fully exists in the colonies. [...] Perhaps the French revolution only took place, because the Marats had no French colony where they could become prime minister, and perhaps England has hitherto been exempted from a social cataclysm only because it owns colonies, in which Catilinean ambitions relatively easily find satisfaction. All plebeian talents, who could become a danger to the 'upper ten thousand', in this way have been made harmless, and the masses who remained in Britain, bend to the aristocratic yoke like willing cattle. The precondition of democracy is the self-esteem and responsibility [*Mündigkeit*] of the lower sections of the people. This precondition is absent in England.⁸⁵

The horizon of the English working class remains at the level of wage disputes, and it does not see the importance of democratic political demands, necessary to abolish its exploitation by the aristocracy. The political slogans of the Chartists and the International (presumably via the Reform League) left little impression on the English worker.⁸⁶ The 'upper ten thousand' is very conscious about the role, for its material interests, of religious sentiment in the masses, and reinforcement of this religiosity is its foremost tool of rule [*Regierungsmittel*].⁸⁷

7. Views on economy (crises, world division of labour)

Nordau held to a labour theory of value: 'The science of political economy has established the fact that the value of things is determined by the greater or less facility with which one can obtain them, and not by the degree in which they are indispensable to man'.⁸⁸

Nordau holds to an economic theory of overproduction:

⁸⁵Nordau 1880, pp. 73–4 (my translation).

⁸⁶See Nordau 1880, pp. 66–7.

⁸⁷See Nordau 1880, p. 86.

⁸⁸Nordau 1886a, p. 233, my correction.

Production widely surpasses the bound of what England and Europe can consume, and the country every so often must wage a bloody war, to obtain or open a market for itself. Humanity is forced into excessive and unnecessary consumption, solely so that the mass of commodities, produced by English factories, can be sold. Overproduction of course forces the prices down, and this has as a result, not the lessening of the profit of factory-owners and merchants, but that of the wage of the worker. The workers must toil ever more, in order to afford what even their miserable existence requires, and the more they work, the more the value of their product falls, the less their wage is. This is a heartless vicious circle, in which the workers are helplessly driven around.⁸⁹

It is a truism for Nordau, that overproduction motivates the imperialist search for markets:

Everything [in the Western world] tends towards industry. The population neglects the ungrateful production of raw material, and will only create the better-paying industrial goods. There is, consequently, an over-production, and the national economy can be carried on only when the nation succeeds in disposing at a fair price of the mass of its commodities. The market is in our time the great anxiety of all Governments, the aim of every statecraft. The fear of crises and of complete industrial bankruptcy spurs the national egoism to ferocity and overshadows the reasoning faculties of the responsible leaders of the nations.⁹⁰

More significant herewith is the emergence of a world division of labour, with European workers doing highly-differentiated machine labour, and the other, more backward peoples doing the agriculture. Food and natural products are exchanged, in a 'seemingly fair' manner [*scheinbar in billigem Austausch*], against higher-industry products:

⁸⁹Nordau 1880, pp. 89-90 (my translation).

⁹⁰Nordau 1904d, pp. 282-3.

But only seemingly. The peoples on a lower level mostly do not need these higher-industry products. One imposes these upon them. This one euphemistically calls 'raising them toward more developed wants'. The higher people can apply the faintly-disguised coercion [*Zwang*] on the lower people, only when it is its ruler. And because of this, Western-Europe must not merely carry on trade with peoples in Africa and Asia, but rule and command them.⁹¹

Nordau sees for the white race the role of mild, responsible rulers, devoted to more intellectual tasks (of industrial labour), whom the other races feed (by agricultural labour), and cites, as a lover of Indian culture, the wisdom of 'prophetic verses' on the social division into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras.⁹²

8. Class composition (workers, peasants, intellectuals)

This is one of those occasions in his writings that are irredeemably non-socialist. But it can be contrasted to his comment on the ranking of the division of labour, during his review of the first two 'spartan' novels of Jules Vallès's *Jacques Vingtras* trilogy. These novels deal with one of the 'biggest problems of modern civilisation': the problem of the educated proletariat, which has a university diploma similar to the nation's upper class, but no qualification for an actual bread-earning job, and is declassed. The educated look down upon manual labour as unworthy, as 'lower' jobs. The alternative to the misery of being 'crushed in the iron arms of industry, burned by [ambitious] fever of the big city life, suffocated in the airless and dull liberal professions' seems, in the eyes of Jacques Vingtras, a 'return' to the holy soil of the nameless, ignorant, but serene peasant, – that, or becoming a revolutionary.⁹³ In his diaries Herzl wrote of the Jews constituting a 'frightful proletariat of intellectuals', of 'our overproduction of average minds who

⁹¹Nordau 1898, p. 8 (my translation).

⁹²See Nordau 1898, p. 8.

⁹³See Nordau 1884, pp. 230–2. Also in Nordau 1887.

cannot sink and cannot rise'. It is not Nordau who looked down on agriculture, or even on manual labour, and if, perhaps, he loathed anything, it would be (like in *Degeneration*) the educated, upper classes.⁹⁴ At the same time, against a tendency of raising manual workers above intellectual workers, which would create a 'hereditary proletariat' with privileges (that he saw in the Bolshevik revolution), he stressed the importance of intellectuals, with examples of socialists of petty-bourgeois social position, educating and leading proletarians.⁹⁵ A return to the countryside (or as a social program, the abolition of the division between city and countryside) was not a special idea of Nordau, nor an exclusively Zionist idea.

9. How outlandish is a Zionist socialist?

Nordau reached out to socialist Jewish workers in his 25 January 1899 speech in Vienna ('Strömungen des Judentums').⁹⁶ The following day at a banquet in Nordau's honour Herzl criticised the speech: 'I am namely not of the opinion, that Zionism lets itself fit entirely in the panel of socialism. But I believe, that Zionism is a building which can encompass all parties'.⁹⁷ In reply Nordau avoided polemics:

I am said to have made too many concessions to socialism. I do not know [if that reproach is justified]. My friend Dr Herzl himself says: "In the house of my father there is room for everyone". – I say to the socialists: You have ideals, we too, they overlap in many points, not everywhere, try it with Zionism. You will see, that for all legitimate – no laws opposing – ideals you will find room with us.⁹⁸

⁹⁴In a mild review of *L'Ordination* (1911) of Julien Benda, later famous for *La trahison des clercs* (1927), Nordau praised Benda's *Le Bergsonisme* (1912) for its destructive criticism of this pseudo-philosophy fashionable among 'snobs, mystic fuddlers, idealistic-pretending chatterboxes and the wilful reactionaries [*Rückwärtser*] and intellectual light-extinguishers' (Nordau 1913a, p. 1).

⁹⁵See Nordau 1920a (also in Nordau 1887). The article 'Communisme' (lot no. 137 of Paris 2016 auction) from around 1919–20, pp. 7, which probably appeared in *La Nación*, is maybe the same as this (Nordau 1920a).

⁹⁶The speech is discussed by Ben-Horin 1956, p. 156.

⁹⁷*Die Welt* 1899, 3 February (5), p. 7 (my translation).

⁹⁸*Die Welt* 1899, 3 February (5), pp. 7–8 (my translation). Nordau mentions Herzl's criticism in

Nordau repeated his speech on 28 January in Berlin ('Kapitalismus, Sozialismus und Zionismus') and on 30 January in Cologne ('Für wen arbeitet der Zionismus?' or 'Wem will der Zionismus helfen?'). It is included in the 1909 collection of Nordau's Zionist writings.⁹⁹ It is also included (under the title: 'Les socialistes') in the French 1936 collection, but without the first half of the article which attacked Jewish millionaires. It was rebuffed in the Marxist weekly *Die neue Zeit* through a presentation of the reality of Zionism by the anti-Zionist Zetterbaum (who argued Nordau's pro-socialism was an exception), though incidentally he made a noteworthy concession at the outset: 'Against the end goal of Zionism, against the foundation of a Jewish state in Palestine, Social-Democracy in principle has nothing to object'.¹⁰⁰ How rare were socialist sympathies among the founders of 'Zionism', in a very broad (and vague) sense?

I already mentioned the self-described Marxist David Farbstein, who also at the Fifth Zionist Congress (1901) gave a speech on economic questions. The Hebrew-writer Eliahu Wolf Rabinowitz (1853–1932) was a socialist. Adam Rosenberg (1858–1928), 'one of the earliest American Zionists' as a study on him is titled, in New York had been a member of the Socialist Labor Party (with Daniel De Leon) and in 1889 held lectures at the Labor Lyceum on Marx's Definition of Values; Marx's Theory of Values; The Labor Movement vs. Single Land Tax Theory [of Henry George]; Karl Marx's Theory of Exchange; and, Karl Marx's Analysis of Capitalist Production.¹⁰¹ Nathan Birnbaum is generally considered a socialist. In 'The Principles of Zionism', by the way, Birnbaum (defensively) states: 'The quintessence of anti-Semitic theories, which Zionism reputedly would prop up, is not, that we are a nation, but that we are an innately rotten nation'.¹⁰² In an 1896 lecture Birnbaum says:

a letter to his wife: '[... Herzl] found me a little too socialist. What do you want...' (Nordau 1928, p. 203, my translation). A subtext here is maybe placating the Austrian government's initial suspicion of Zionism as a subversive movement.

⁹⁹It is erroneously filed there as a 17 April 1899 Amsterdam speech. For a transcript of his actual Amsterdam speech see *Centraal blad voor Israëlieten in Nederland*, 21 April 1899.

¹⁰⁰Zetterbaum 1901, p. 326.

¹⁰¹Announced throughout 1889 in the *Workmen's advocate*.

¹⁰²'Die Principien des Zionismus', *Selbst-emancipation*, 5 (1892), 6-7 (April), p. 8.

One foretells though, that in New-Judea too the Jewish workers will be exploited by the Jewish capitalists. Precisely from the socialist standpoint, this is a nonsensical objection. If at the time, assuming the creation of the Jewish state will be perfect, the whole world is still capitalistically arranged, then it will not be possible, – and no sensible socialist will desire the impossibility, – that, precisely the Jews in their little state organise themselves socialistically. An isolated socialist society, and moreover in a very limited area, is simply unthinkable. But if the whole world becomes socialist, then certainly not, with the subjectively socialist traditions of the Jewish tribe, exactly the Jewish country would want to close itself off from the new economic order. And it would also not be able to do so, because a country cannot shut itself off from the economic structure, that exists in all countries of the same (type of) culture.¹⁰³

The label of socialist, however, does not befit the alleged coiner of the term 'Zionist' (before Birnbaum), Alfred Nossig (1864–1943), who, as a self-avowed 'practical' Zionist, also does not strictly qualify as a Zionist.¹⁰⁴ This might seem a paradoxical claim at first sight, for at least Nossig did identify himself as some kind of socialist. At age twenty Nossig wrote a prize-winning study on demography (against Malthus), in which he resembles a *kathedersozialist* (wealth redistribution, education, health, women equality).¹⁰⁵ Nossig reviewed Kautsky's *The Agrarian Question* (1899) in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*. Nossig was very familiar with socialist writings, Marx's included, as is evident from his *Revision des Socialismus; Das System des Socialismus* (prolegomena, volume 1, 1901); *Die moderne Agrarfrage* (the modern agrarian question, volume 2, 1902) – together nearly a thousand pages. But copious citation of Marxist writings is not itself a sufficient criterion for a socialist. Nossig was

¹⁰³Birnbaum, Nathan 1910, 'Die jüdische Moderne', in *Ausgewählte Schriften zur jüdischen Frage*, p. 61 (my translation).

¹⁰⁴Supposedly he coined the word 'Zionist' in a 1887 brochure (in Polish), based on his 1886 article-series 'Próba rozwiązania kwestii żydowskiej', which appeared in *Przegląd Społeczny* (incidentally alongside Plekhanov's full article-series on Lassalle), although I did not see the word in this work. Nossig was quite active as an organiser. Living in France, Nossig in January 1894 helped organise in Paris an international conference of palestinophile societies. This conference is mentioned in Saul Rafael Landau's 1937 *Sturm und Drang im Zionismus*.

¹⁰⁵Translated in German ('Über die Bevölkerung') in 1885 as an article-series in *Kosmos*.

regarded as a leader of the revisionists. He was attacked by Franz Mehring, who, mostly to his own surprise, 'discovered' that Nossig was a Zionist: 'Incidentally, it is a nice compliment for the clarity created by "Revisionism", that underneath its banner, Zionist cuckoo's eggs would be, and to some extent have been, smuggled into Social Democracy'.¹⁰⁶ A reviewer even in the Zionist *Die Welt* rejected Nossig's confused demand of a biblical Jubilee, which 'could only exist at a time when credit relations were not yet developed', and concluded, that '[i]n a socialist society, however, the remission of debts is unnecessary - because debts do not exist'.¹⁰⁷ Even excluding Nossig though, it is still the case that there were socialists among the early 'Zionists', and so it would not be outlandish if Nordau was one of them.

Rather, what is more outlandish about my claim of the socialist label for Nordau is, that he was a correspondent for mainstream (liberal) newspapers, and had a wide audience for his writings, and his reputation in intellectual history often even is that of a conservative.

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¹⁰⁶Mehring in *Die neue Zeit*, 1901 (19), p. 349.

¹⁰⁷Farbstein 1901, p. 11.

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Appendix

The following is a translation of Nordau, Max 1910b, 'El apólogo de Menenio Agripa', *Vida Socialista*, 1, 8 (20 February): 3.

The Apologue of Menenius Agrippa

The Plebeians of Rome were tired of working solely for the benefit of the Patricians, who were dedicated to consuming what the efforts of others produced. One day, they all left the city and retreated to the Mount Sacro, which served as the House of the People in those times before such institutions had been invented. It was the first general strike. The Patricians were left in the city, terrified. What to do? The first idea that occurred to

everyone was naturally to defeat the rebels with force. However, a glance at the situation was enough to abandon such a plan. The Patricians had weapons, but the proletarians had muscle. The former had social prestige, but the latter had numbers. The former were proud, disdainful, vengeful and overbearing; the latter were exasperated, desperate, tired of suffering and determined to improve their condition or die. Truly, victory did not promise itself to the lords. A cunning senator proposed negotiating with the rebels and persuading them to return to obedience. He was acclaimed. This senator was the old knight Menenius Agrippa, as good a diplomat as he was a soldier, as skilled as he was brave; he immediately went to the plebeians, who received him with hostile silence. He offered himself smiling, with a genial manner and calm words. He greeted them with his hand and said:

'Listen to me, dear friends: You have done a real foolishness. You complain about being alone in your work while we enjoy it. Well, I want to tell you a fable. Once, the four members of a body revolted against the stomach. "What!" they said, "We work, we tire ourselves and only the stomach enjoys it? Is this fair? Why should it be him who alone enjoys the good things and we are left with nothing of what we provide him? This must end." And the four members went on strike, no longer providing any food to the stomach, enjoying making him go hungry. But their satisfaction lasted only a short time. The stomach, indeed, remained empty and suffered, but the members stopped receiving the nutritive juice elaborated by the stomach, and wasted away, weakened, becoming dull and indolent. Fortunately, they soon realised their mistake and, with the little strength that was left to them, already on the verge of death, they humbly offered food to the stomach, begging him to return to working for them, nourishing them as when there was good agreement between him and the members.'

The senator fell silent. A murmur of approval ran through the ranks of the strikers. In a low voice, it was said in the groups: 'The gentleman speaks well; he is right.' But an old man named Sannita, pale in appearance from long vicissitudes, with a sad look, strode towards the elegant orator with his mellifluous words and said in a voice that revealed ancient angers:

'Sir, I do not possess, like you, the art of weaving a speech artificially, because I am a poor worker without education; but even so, I will also tell you a little story: Once upon a time, there lived a beautiful, robust ram who could have been happy if he did not suffer the torment of parasitic animals. These pernicious insects penetrated his flesh, sucked his blood and fattened monstrously at his expense. For a long time, the ram suffered in silence, always having lived by feeding his tormentors, and all his flock-mates were in the same condition as he was, as if they believed that things should happen this way necessarily. But one day, when the bites of the parasites became too cruel, the poor creature, feeling faint with pain and weakness, let out a bleat of rage and called out to his companions: "Friends," he said, "we are too stupid letting ourselves be sucked of blood and tortured by these parasites. Let's rip them from our bodies." Suddenly, the little animals became alarmed. "What!" they screamed, "You rebel against us, ungrateful and villainous? Do you not understand that we are part of your body, that we are necessary organs for you, as the pupils are to your eyes? Have you ever seen a sheep without us? Without our company, you could not live. To rip us would be to mutilate you. We..." But they could not finish. The rams had already seized the disgusting ticks with their teeth, ripped them from their ulcerated bodies and trampled them under their avenging hooves. Then even the most irrational rams understood that such insects are nothing more than filthy and harmful bugs that one should not consent to carry at any cost.'

The plebeians, thrilled, lifted the old Sannita in their arms. Menenius Agrippa returned to Rome mortified, and the Patricians found themselves in the position of accepting all the rather modest conditions of the strikers who were aware of their power.